

THE
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BREED

by M. Constantin
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Author of
A MAN SCANS
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MACAULAY



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**Author of A MAN SCANS HIS PAST
(Goncourt Prize Novel)**



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THE HALF-BREED

CHAPTER ONE

WITHOUT too much pretension, the Red River might well affect a certain air of importance. It has its source in Wisconsin, just a few hundred miles from the Canadian border—a fact of some interest—and, like any young stream of water, it amuses itself on the way by lapping the banks of lazy, verdure-clad hills or leprous rocks, and solicitously picking up numberless little brooks, which, like all vagabonds, are forever singing slow melancholy ballads, or lively bantering ditties.

After this apprenticeship, Red River quite naturally aspires to a social and, incidentally, perfectly useless role. In the vain hope of splitting Canada into two approximately equal sections, it thrusts its way straight north like a flattened bar of slightly tarnished pewter. Thus it proceeds, a lazy, somnolent and muddy river flowing sluggishly but majestically through rich alluvial lands, between rows of glossy willows, past blue prairies, past fields of russet wheat and little farms so hidden among the trees that the only signs of

their existence are little wisps of gray smoke. At last it plunges into Lake Winnipeg, innocently mistaking that body of water for the sea.

With the approach of winter Red River withdraws beneath a thick shell of ice where, one imagines, it sleeps. But with the coming of spring it awakens, betraying its return to life by the noisy cracking of its rheumatic joints or by various gurglings and mumblings similar to those an old woman might make when she forgets that she is not alone or forgets that ice is only a thin and treacherous partition. But when Red River is finally awake it tosses restlessly in its bed, skilfully breaks its crystal casing, and without too much useless effort resumes its ordinary, docile existence.

However, in the spring of 1868, evidently awakened by some terrible nightmare, it behaved in a most indecent way. First of all, it broke its sheath of ice prematurely, cracked the ice into splinters and carried the fragments downstream until they met a barrier. There the ice-floe piled up with a thunderous crash, split into jagged prisms and, in a disorderly cluster of sharp edges, resolved the sunlight into its component colors.

The prisms glittered like infinitely precious jewels: jewels of blue, violet, red, orange, yellow and green.

A short while later when the real thaw came, the Red River was powerless to break through the dam of accumulated ice. Against this dam the swollen river struggled in vain. It flung the far too sluggish mass of its muddy waves against the barrier. It hurled huge blocks of ice, blocks silvery above and bottle green along their edges, but these rams were powerless against the obstinate wall. For though they assailed the dam with a terrible noise and blustering threats, they made no breach. The river flung sparkling fireworks of gushing water and bits of ice into the air. But it was all just so much wasted energy. For when the ice-floe had realized the dam was also formed of ice, it felt a certain kinship and joined hands against their common enemy, the river. And the ice jam grew in size and solidity, preparing for the river's next assault.

But the Red River returned patiently and obstinately to the task. Raising its muddy waters above the level of the ice it plunged with the care-free and thunderous fury of a cataract over the dam. But even this did not help. Finally weary,

but realizing it would be conqueror in the end, that with the help of the sun it would wear down the dam's resistance, the Red River poured quietly over its banks and resigned itself to lying outside its bed for a few days.

For a temporary home it borrowed the farms of the settlers, the French-Indian half-breeds who lived along its banks. And it did not return the borrowed farms to their owners until days had passed during which the river slept, stagnant and fetid, in a sort of voluptuous indolence.

For this reason planting was unusually late that year. And though it was extremely difficult to plow the soggy land, the planters' efforts bore witness to a splendid faith in the fundamental benevolence of the earth and sun. But no sooner had the tender shoots put forth leaves than grasshoppers descended upon the fresh growth. To a shrill, metallic song, they devoured everything with their voracious jaws, and ruined all hope of a good harvest.

That same spring the hunters who had gone out looking for buffaloes came back early, and were coldly welcomed by their families when they announced that the wandering herds had been driven

far south by an unseasonable blizzard and that it was useless to count on succulent bison flesh, so rich in red juice and fine streaked fat.

And so it happened that both bread and meat were scarce in the colony. The children's cheeks became sunken; eyes that were made for laughter wept in longing for food, and when the little tots lifted the skirts of their too short dresses to wipe their eyes and runny noses, one could see the skin lying in flabby folds on their emaciated little bellies. . . . Mothers' breasts went dry, and the men, after watching fruitlessly for small game, which had been driven far back by the flood, sat gnawing their fingers trying to think out some way of feeding the household until the next season.

It was then the news came that two English surveyors, Snow and Mair, had obtained the necessary sum from the Canadian government for the construction of the Dawson highway, which was to cross the continent from one ocean to the other. They had established themselves a few miles to the east in search of men, to whom they promised good wages. This news, in spite of the circumstances, was greeted with less enthusiasm than one would believe.

After having vanquished the Indians who were the first owners of the land, the half-breeds had lived in a state of happy anarchy, and the arrival of the two foreigners, in spite of the fact that it opened up prospects of food, created also a visible menace to their independence. Prince Rupert's land was a direct dependence of the British Crown, which was far away and paid no attention to territory that had long since passed as unproductive. On the other hand, there was every reason to fear the interference of the Canadian government, which was aware of the value of the Northwest, and desirous of gaining the good will of a few financial groups.

Moreover, the lack of contact between the half-breeds and the Anglo-Saxons, as well as the word-of-mouth traditions which their fathers had taught them as children, combined to add fear to the hopes of this starving people.

The ancestors of these half-breeds were French. At the beginning of the 17th Century a certain De la Vérendrye, with a few companions whose daring was considered sheer madness, had made his way up the St. Lawrence as far as the Great Lakes, crossed Niagara Falls and launched his

frail fleet of birch bark canoes on the angry, savage waters of the inland seas. Being an active poet, he reveled in unforeseen to-morrows. He left Lake Superior to ascend muddy creeks, where the sun never penetrated except through the tall forest. These creeks led him to the *Lake of the Woods*, which was sprinkled with little islands reflecting their foliage in the dull green water. From there, trusting to coulees and swamps, he went as far as the basin of the Red River where he encountered the Sioux Indians and defeated them. In the name of the *Roy de France* he unfurled the *fleur-de-lys* pennant to the winds of the prairie, then, recognizing the sources of the Mississippi, he made a gift to France of the immense empire which at that time was called Louisiana and which, later, formed a good third of the United States and Canada. Though La Vérendrye had claimed this territory for France, it did not prevent Charles II of England from conceding a part of this territory, the present Manitoba, to his cousin Prince Rupert, who gave his name to the country and founded the Hudson Bay Company (English) to compete with the French fur trade which had been daringly undertaken by the Northwestern Fur Company.

The Northwestern Fur Company enlisted in France adventurers of the first order, whose dominating quality was recklessness. On the blue, silken sea, swollen and ceaselessly furrowed to let billows of white lace go by, the prows steadied themselves with a ripping noise, while the passengers sang lovely French refrains in chorus.

*A Saint Malo, beau port de mer
Trois gros navires sont arrivés.*

They shouted their hopes of quick wealth to the sun. Sometimes the ship was tossed about on black and gray waves fifty feet high, or wrapped in a fog that had the color and consistency of cold pea soup. Then the lads from Flanders, Picardy, Normandy, Brittany or the Vendée, united in a common faith, would pray for the aid of St. Anne d'Auray, our Lady of the Mast. . . . Meanwhile English competition cast on the desolate banks of Hudson Bay gloomy Scotchmen, psalm-singers of the Hebrew verses of the Old Testament, who were forever ready to consider all those who did not belong to the reformed religion, revised and corrected by John Knox, as Amalekites.

The two races met where the hunting was good, where the white ermine with its black spotted tail

flaunted its independence across the snow, calm in the knowledge that its stinking flesh would never tempt a carnivorous animal. But it did not know that its skin was worth its weight in gold, whether it were measured in good French louis or in fine English guineas. Moreover, certain parts of the country were alive with mink, beaver, otter, sable and black fox, which constituted a considerable addition to the revenues of the rival companies.

For this reason many murders were perpetrated in some of the most marvelous spots in the forest. . . . Hairy, tense mouths drooled the bloody foam of the last agony ; hands were folded with a hasty *In manus*; complete immobility congealed the final grimace into a last grin. . . . Murderers buried what was nothing more than a repugnant *thing* in the peaty soil of the marshes or in the leaf-mold of the forests. . . . Trembling hands (was it only on account of the cold?) were warmed before the same fire that hid the last traces of this labor. . . . Then the victor went far away, so as not to think of it again, while behind him in the night gaunt wolves howled the ritualistic funeral dirge of the forest.

In fanatic souls religion justifies such crimes,

and the rival companies were not the least disturbed by them, having a money score to settle which was of far greater importance than a score of blood. . . .

As a result of the Paris treaty, the French company ceded its rights to its English rival. The French could have reached their Northwestern territory through Louisiana, which extended as far north as the 49th degree of latitude, and for which the Mississippi, an entirely French river, formed a magnificent water way. But it is possible that—like Napoleon—they were ignorant of this detail—an ignorance which made the United States possible. . . . We are not entirely sure whether the French company sold its employees to the English, or whether, on leaving, it simply forgot them.

These abandoned men married Chippewa, Cree or Chippewaian Indian women, as well as Eskimos and, more rarely, Sioux; and, being promiscuous, they had numerous children by these women, as is the custom of poor parents. Their offspring had all the faults of both races, but they also often combined French impetuosity with the energetic endurance of the Indian.

Of such stuff were the half-breeds.

Even in the case of the most mystic Puritans, the flesh may weaken. A few Scotchmen also mingled their blood with that of the squaws when the man in them called louder than the saint. The Scotch half-breeds, who were less looked down upon by the whites than the French half-breeds, were nevertheless despised enough for them to decide to live with the French and to intermarry. When the missionaries arrived, the child-like souls of these Scotch half-breeds were moved by the comparative splendor, even in this rough country, of the Roman ritual, and most of them became Catholics.

In spite of cold, exhaustion and poverty, these men lived happily. It was rare that hunting did not appease hunger and, moreover, they were absolutely independent of the wishes of their fellow-beings.

On the other hand there were summer sunsets following long, hot afternoons heavy with the scent of hay or there were discreet winter evenings that seemed to linger above trees silhouetted against the dead white snow like a narrow ribbon of purple at the edge of a tarnished silver sky. And there were the impetuous springs when the freshets of the first thaw begin rushing and the sweet-smelling

willow buds burst open as if from prison. And there were dry, burning summers of endless, sunny days when the lace of sunlight lies in the violet and shadowy forests. And there were radiant autumns, like bronze lightning, when the first hoarfrost melting exhales a troubling odor of mold and dry leaves. Or the winters, too, with the splendor of strange lights when it is very cold. And finally there was hunting in the exciting scenery of the forest with the thin smoke of the camp fire winding in spirals amid coppery lights and turquoise shadows. And how many other unexpected things there were that make unconscious poets of the most brutish men. But on one condition, however, that preoccupation with gold has not dulled all one's joy of living or destroyed the natural pleasure of breathing the universe deep into one's lungs.

Here on the edge of the prairie wilderness the westward progress of French influence was sustained by two groups. First there were a few thousand French-Indian half-breeds. They were a lazy, drunken, quarrelsome, improvident lot, ignorant of both good and evil, often under-nourished, and practically illiterate. But they clung with a naive

and touching faith to a language that was formless, vulgar, crude, awkward: a language that bristled with colloquialisms, with English and Indian expressions, but one nevertheless that contained all the essentials of French. Secondly, there were a number of French and French-Canadian missionaries. They were influential and kindly, proud but humble, avaricious yet generous, and finally, very bad psychologists.

For several generations life had been an extraordinary succession of miracles, the most important being the miracle of survival.

Next came the miracle of vanquishing countless tribes of Indians and, after having subjected them, of restraining these blood-thirsty people within the limits of a mild and more or less respectable drunkenness. But there was an even greater miracle: their comparatively amicable relations with the Scotch colonists whom Lord Selkirk, as early as 1823, had sent to Prince Rupert's Land, in the magnificent hope that *at least one* of them would survive to hold aloft before the world, and more particularly before the half-breeds, the British flag and the Presbyterian Bible. (This hope has been more than realized.)

However, it was only when the British explorers,

around 1850, began swarming in with surveyors' kits and little note-books full of mysterious directions, that things started to go badly.

First of all, certain newspapers in the province of Ontario praised the wealth of the Northwestern Territory to the Anglo-Saxons.

In 1862, thanks to these worthless sheets, Winnipeg existed. This capital consisted of ten houses. There was a governor—Dallas, who got rich—a protestant minister—Corbett, who was convicted of attacking a little girl in the catechism class—a lot of trembling sheep who rescued this “indubitable” satyr from prison—a certain James Stewart, grocer and school-master (in both capacities he probably had much on his conscience); a William Hallet and a John Burke who were fired by a religious faith that made them hate particularly the Catholics and the French; a newspaper, *The Nor'Wester*, founded in 1859 by a certain Buckingham, a delegate of the Orangeist group, who landed at Winnipeg with a hand press, a bale of paper and far too much bustle; a Dr. Schulz, an old-timer of the Orangeist group, who bought *The Nor'Wester* from Buckingham, the latter being too moderate for his tastes, in order to attack more

effectively the half-breeds, the Catholic missionaries and, in addition to these, the powerful Hudson Bay Company; a dozen young Orangeists out of work, whom the Ontario groups sent to Dr. Schulz as efficient help (here read: as bandits and scoundrels), a certain Thomas Spence who, in 1867, established an absurd, independent republic at Portage-la-Prairie, which lasted just long enough to permit its founder to do some profitable trading in astonishingly fertile land and to build up a small fortune for himself, which he was smart enough to put in a safe place in the United States.

It was at this period that, in disregard of the most elementary conventions, the Canadian government at Ottawa dealt directly with the Hudson Bay Company without consulting the half-breeds, and negotiated, without their knowledge, the purchase of the Northwest. The government acquired this territory for three hundred thousand pounds sterling, paid in cash. More than that, once the land was surveyed, a sixteenth part of it was to remain the property of the Company.

But echoes of this had come to the ears of the legitimate proprietors of the land (through rights of conquest and colonization) and, in spite of their

poverty, these men hesitated to sell their brawn to people who to them stood for theft and robbery.

Antoine Morin, who possessed a natural boldness, was the first to go where Snow and Mair were camping in the mauve shadow of the spruce forests which border the river La Senne, east of the Red River.

The famine had melted his fat but it had not been able to melt the muscles which indented his athletic frame. He drove along, seated on the edge of his wagon, his legs dangling and his poverty already forgotten, for he was of the kind to whom hope is a reality, and it never occurred to him that the two Englishmen might not give him a friendly welcome.

When Morin arrived, they were busy frying bacon over a fine bed of red and gray coals, from which every puff of wind sent pretty little blue flames dancing and flying about. The delicious odor was wafted afar, and two miles to the north a foolish wolf howled mournfully with a ravenous hunger.

The customs of the West would have required the two Englishmen to invite Morin to take part in this feast. They, however, without a word, let

him hitch his horses, still harnessed, to the trunk of a silver barked aspen. Mair—who was a funny little fellow, short and round, his face covered with blotches, his hair red, his eyes green and wearing a black sateen shirt wide open so that it showed his short fat neck—skilfully slipped the contents of the frying pan into two pewter plates, while the long slim Snow, his dull glassy eyes apparently seeing nothing, cut the bread and spread it with salted butter. The half-breed then seated himself opposite the two Englishmen on the fallen trunk of a dead maple and filled his red-clay pipe with Kenik-Kenik, the bark of red dogwood. Unperturbed, he blew the acrid smoke up into the trees. But his hunger could not be deceived by the gnawed pipe-stem. After the third puff, he spat on the ground and, without a smile, made a gesture of declining an imaginary invitation.

“Thanks,” he said, “I’ve had my dinner.”

Mair understood the irony of this remark, but didn’t relish it. He turned on the half-breed with a look in which anger danced in cold, cruel little flashes, then said drily:

“I’m very glad for your sake. That surely doesn’t happen to you every day.”

Snow, looking quite severe, shook a finger,

gleaming with melted suet and butter, at his partner.

“Shut up, Mair!” he said with authority. Then turning to Morin he said gently:

“My friend there talks a lot and says nothing. The fact is we need men damnably and we’re ready to pay them. . . .”

He interrupted himself to stare at Morin with his clammy, sickening eyes—frog’s eyes, thought the half-breed—then he added:

“In kind, of course. But I imagine that’s what you need most . . . bacon, flour, tea, sugar. . . .”

Then he announced his terms. They were Draconian.

According to the wage agreed upon by Snow, and the rate at which he counted the supplies representing payment, a man would have to work six days out of seven, and twelve hours out of twenty-four, with his hunger only half appeased, in order to bring home enough to keep his wife and children from, literally, starving to death.

Morin calculated quickly and lowered his long, narrow head in despair. His heavy dark locks hung over his forehead. Snow watched him knowingly. Here was surely an excellent example of

human cattle; those thick bones, those long sinewy muscles, those heavy knotted hands with their square fingers, should make a first-class woodcutter of the man. Snow rejoiced privately; with a few hundred such fellows as these he would quickly open up a temporary road through the forest. He also knew how to make this work acceptable to the proper authorities and had even foreseen, in his budget, a keg of wine that would be both necessary and sufficient. Moreover, it was highly improbable that the authorities would take the trouble to investigate for themselves, and in the case of an unexpected complaint, he would always, as a last resort, blame the rigors of the climate, or even, what was still simpler, the Red River colonists.

Having thus thought the matter over, Snow spoke again. He had a sharp authoritative voice which accented disagreeably each syllable and ended the dry tone of his sentences with the brittle sound of a snapping violin string.

"Hello, there! my friend! I'm going to make a bargain with you: if you'll get me a hundred men, I mean husky men, I'll hire you as foreman, and you'll get double pay."

Mair grunted something which resembled a

murmur of horror, to which Snow replied by quoting the proverb:

“Penny wise, pound foolish.”

Mair said nothing more, and as consolation took a piece of left-over bacon from the skillet, raised it level with his eyes between his thumb and forefinger, and swallowed it voraciously.

Tents were pitched in the shadow of the oak trees; acrid blue smoke strove hard to drive off the mosquitoes; women’s voices could be heard calling; the shrill voices of little children answered them; frying pans knocked against the base-log of the fire with a joyous tinkle; fat melted with a sizzling sound, and the odor of bacon floated deliciously and temptingly in the air. With heads lowered, the little bronchos, no higher than ponies, pulled at the traces until the sweat streaked their coats; once the furrow was plowed, the men allowed their bronchos to nibble the feathery flower of the wild pea. Hatchets rang against the trees; the noise of aspens and firs crashing into the brushwood muffled the sound of loud cursing. A perfectly straight road began to open up vistas of pale sky and hazy distances.

Snow left the matter of cursing the workmen

to the foreman, Morin, and the most exacting man alive would have agreed that Morin acquitted himself well. He had a collection of curses at his command which were expressive, albeit in no way original, having been for the most part borrowed from the rites of the Catholic Church, such as: chalice, tabernacle, host, etc. . . . His vocabulary made the other half-breeds tremble, for they feared that God, in a moment of regrettable but decisive inattention would strike them down along with the blasphemer. Janvier Ritchot, in particular, who observed most of the ten commandments, made his long inexpressive face, already six feet from the ground, even longer, in order to ward off the bolt which he momentarily expected. Finally he grew accustomed to this danger and became somewhat reassured. Morin had undoubtedly made a bargain with the devil.

More skeptical, MacDougall, a little man with broad shoulders, a flattened nose and large blond Celtic mustaches, replied that it looked to him as though Morin had made some sort of bargain with Snow whereby the poor half-breeds would kick off from hunger and fatigue.

"After all," he said, "Snow or the devil, it's about the same thing."

Mair's intemperate language was received less meekly. He lacked the muscle to match his vulgarity and brought upon himself serious arguments as well as a few direct threats. One day Janvier Ritchot suggested that they should "make a noose for that rascal," and, while he was talking, looked up significantly at the strong branches of an elm, as if he had calculated the height necessary for Mair to swing six feet above ground, just enough to set a good example. From that day Snow managed the camp alone and Mair was commissioned to travel back and forth between Winnipeg and the work-yards, to go after provisions and bring the mail.

This new job gave Mair a lot of spare time which he used to advantage. Having been at one time a sort of school teacher, like all those who knew how to read, he had retained from this period the unfounded pretension of knowing how to write. He went in for the epistolary style and sent letters which he considered the essence of humor and philosophy to an Ontario newspaper. In these letters he described, in his own way, the customs of the inhabitants of the West.

In between times he ran after the women.

With no difficulty Mair had made conquests

among several half-breed women of different ages and doubtful beauty. He employed two alternative means of seduction, both of which were equally infallible if applied at the right moment.

To a young mother whose milk was drying up he would offer a nice piece of bacon, or a sack of flour. He was enough of an artist, too, to experience pure joy as he watched on the poor creature's face the various phases of the struggle between the disgust he inspired, the fear that her husband might find them together, the longing to tell the whole story to her confessor, and, what was always the strongest sentiment of all, vast maternal love.

Or else he simply threatened to discharge the husband. At this the woman would cling to his knees and he would lift her up quite gently as he dried her eyes: not without remarking aloud, however, that it was a pity to make such pretty eyes weep. Then, with the air of a man who is ready to neglect all his duties and even betray his partner for love, he would promise to intercede with Snow. . . . It was always Snow who served as a screen for Mair's dirty little affairs.

Finally one day he grew tired of dark hair and jet eyes. Moreover, he would not have objected

to receiving a little loving occasionally, rape having become in itself an insipid pleasure.

And so one morning in Winnipeg he found himself on his knees before the beautiful Mrs. Hamarstyne. The novelty of seeing himself in this posture gave him at first an agreeable surprise. Mrs. Hamarstyne was tall and slender, with shapely shoulders, a charming bosom—as far as one could judge through her full blouse of white calico with red polka-dots—a pink and white sweater, lovely wavy hair the color of ripe barley, and blue eyes of great sweetness . . . usually. But these eyes promptly became severe as Mrs. Hamarstyne protected her calves with the folds of her skirt and threatened to call her husband. Our ladies' man laughed a very stupid laugh, and pretended to be joking. Awkwardly he insisted, while his hand stroked for a moment the roundness of a leg that was both firm and supple. . . . Then Mrs. Hamarstyne took a step backwards. (All this happened in a sunny kitchen that was set for the most subtle flirtations.) Suddenly a bucket of water descended on Mair's head, its contents soaked him all over and his icy clothes were glued to his skin. . . . Then, without paying the least attention to the ridiculous figure who departed, dripping wet,

making muddy tracks in the dry dust of the street, Mrs. Hamarstyne busied herself repairing the traces of her victory that remained on the floor.

It was then that Mair published in the Ontario newspaper a certain letter accusing the women of Winnipeg of deceiving their husbands most scandalously.

Now it so happened that there were at that time only three women in Winnipeg, so the portraits sketched by Mair, however unskilful they might be, could not help being recognized as the initials X. Y. Z. The three women, in any case, made no mistake. As far as two of them were concerned this sketch of their characters was nothing more than a cowardly slander. Mrs. Y. and Mrs. Z., therefore, remained perfectly easy. They had perhaps several reasons to hope that the pure Mrs. Hamarstyne, answering to the letter X, and enjoying in many respects a well established reputation, would undertake the avenging of their common insult.

A few days later Mair went after the Ontario mail at the post-office, which occupied a corner in the store of James Stewart, grocer, schoolmaster and postmaster. David Mulligan, the clerk,

through some mysterious previous arrangement, took just one jump to go and inform the person most interested in Mair's appearance.

This David Mulligan was a tall, dark chap with a coat of tan and a hooked nose. He had pretensions to a certain elegance which he justified by growing long reddish-black sideburns that he caressed complacently with hands which were generally dirty and always ornamented with rings of imitation gold and jewels (these last always of a fabulous species, or at any rate a species that has disappeared). During the week he was dressed in blue-and-white striped cotton overalls, a black sateen shirt, grown white in the armpits with dried perspiration, and a flashy necktie. On Sunday he dressed up in a swallow-tail coat, which he was not a little proud of, and a starched collar that had been burned by an unskilful iron. It was covered with lumps like an underdone fritter. It was in this get-up that he went to church, looking even taller than usual in a high hat that had long since ceased to shine and had taken on a greenish color from the patina of the years. Stroking his sideburns, he followed the service (in accordance with the charming custom of the English Protestants) from the prayerbook of his lovely neighbor, Mrs.

Hamarstyne. In his heart, he hoped that his fine clothes, combined with his physical advantages and his elegance—he was known as the crow, but he didn't know it—would some day win for him the favor of that most desirable lady.

He might have spared his pains. True it is that a husband existed in the shape of Hamarstyne, a tall, stout man, as placid as a well tamed ox. At night this estimable gentleman, after having taken off his clothes reeking of the stable, washed his face and fat hands, as well as his corn-covered feet, put on a clean red-scalloped night-shirt, and, in spite of his bald head, proved himself entirely capable of fulfilling his duties as a husband, with a wife slow to be aroused, it is true. For intellectual recreation, the reading of the Old Testament and the company of a terribly spoiled collie dog were sufficient for the beautiful lady. She would read three verses in the first and say four words to the second, then go about her household duties, as any good and decent woman should.

More clever, or rather more discreet than Mair, Mulligan came out of it unsuccessful, but also without scandal. He was the man-of-all-work in the household—or rather *almost* all, alas—and he willingly chopped wood in the backyard with his

back to an icy wind, taking the place of the husband who sat by his fire reading the paper and waiting for the hour when he would fulfill his conjugal duties.

In Mair's article there had *naturally* been some question of a certain *crow*. After a quarter of an hour of painful explanations made by Mrs. Hamarstyne, Mulligan finally understood that it was he who was meant by this. He was entirely without malice, however, and after thinking the matter over very deeply, he began to laugh at the joke. Then, seeing that Mrs. Hamarstyne didn't laugh at all, he made another mental effort, at the end of which he offered to undertake the matter of vengeance. This offer was declined. Mrs. Hamarstyne was too worldly-wise to accept any favors and thus gratuitously give the pretext for gossip to the kind tongues of the congregation. She preferred to take the matter of suitable retribution into her own hands. She also stipulated that from that time on Mulligan should limit his flirtation to chopping wood in the backyard, and not come into the house at all. In this way she not only hoped to cut short the slanderous accusations, but she was sure not to have to offer the young man his habitual cup of tea.

Not that she was stingy, but it made just one less cup to wash.

It was Mulligan, then, who told Mrs. Hamarstyne of Mair's presence at the post-office. Without hurrying, realizing that men are inexhaustible gossips, she took time to go to the stable and get one of the whips of plaited, knotted leather which Hamarstyne used to calm his refractory oxen.

As Mrs. Hamarstyne entered Stewart's, Mair was holding forth to the grocer. Orangeists, both of them, they were telling each other of their mutual hopes of ridding Western Canada of Catholic superstitions and the French language; also of teaching the half-breeds that they were no better than mongrels.

They didn't seem to realize that in this way they gave the French half-breeds just one more reason for grouping themselves together in hatred of the English and in defense of Catholicism. But Mair was not stopped by any such details; he became very excited and drew himself up as tall as he could.

Suddenly he saw the woman he had insulted. His glibness left him and he made himself as small as possible; a little rubber mannikin that

had been punctured. . . ! Ten years later Stewart still swore that at that moment Mair's clothes suddenly became five times too big for him.

The culprit listened, without having the force to hear or the sense to understand the stream of words with which women start to relieve their anger. Mrs. Hamarstyne's words were particularly tart, as well as biting and sarcastic. The audience (minus Mair, but including his good friend Stewart) listened with delight, and smiled joyously at the surveyor's embarrassment.

Finally Mrs. Hamarstyne said to him:

"Come out here with me, you lousy dog! Unless you're a damn coward, we'll settle this matter."

This was too much for Mair's nerves, and he began to stutter:

"I-I-I d'- d'-don't fi-i-ight with w-w-women."

But already Mair's "victim" had seized her libeller by the scruff of the neck. Choking, his blackish tongue hanging out of his mouth, Mair no longer resisted the inexorable clutch which was dragging him outside.

His knees were clacking together already. . . . Stupid, whining like a runny-nosed kid, he received the pitiless onslaught of the whip. Blood spurted from his face and nostrils; he felt like a

piece of cheap meat, slashed by a drunken butcher.

Not very clever at getting his revenge against such a woman, who could, if it were necessary, call on her big brute of a husband, Mair took it out on the half-breeds. He reduced their wages and raised the price of the supplies which he forced them to buy from him. He now gave them only twelve piastres (or dollars) per month, payable in merchandise, and sold them a barrel of flour for sixteen dollars that was worth twelve dollars in Winnipeg.

Things did not go so well with him. The half-breeds were tired of being robbed by him and, more than that, they had just learned of the trade, with themselves as object, that had been effected between the Hudson Bay Company and the Canadian Government.

The two, "those dirty dogs of surveyors," were the beginning of all the ugly work, and it was about time it stopped.

They talked about it at night under the trees, in fact they talked only of that. They felt the need of banding together against known misery and unknown dangers, but they had no leader.

"This business has got to stop," growled Mac-Dougg, as he gave his right-hand horse a lash with the whip that left a livid stripe on its hide, and made it spread its fore legs to move its heavy load.

"I've got enough of working my belly flat for them fellows and all the other dogs," replied Janvier Ritchot. "In the first place there's a lot o' bastards in Winnipeg that says they're going to close our churches, and keep us from talking French."

"Oh, sure! Those English is pagans. Sons of Iscariot!"

"Judas faces!"

"All your fine talk, young fellow, is true enough! But that won't make 'em get the hell out o' here!"

"If we only had a leader!"

"Oh, if only Louis Riel was still in this dog of a world. But he's a saint, up with God by now! . . ."

"Still, his boy, the little Louis, he isn't dead."

This comment was from Morin, and, in spite of the fact that everybody present looked askance at him because they knew him to be something of a rascal, they nevertheless valued him for

the intelligence that this very rascality proved he possessed.

That was all that was needed for the name of Riel to re-echo under the Gothic arch of the forest. It seemed to fly with the buzzing swarms of mosquitoes. It glided along the trembling, glistening leaves. It quivered with the wind from the “nor-west” which bent the high branches with its curses. It rippled through the penetrating odors of the blue wheat. It beat against the door of the log cabins. It re-echoed to heaven.

Riel! . . . Riel! . . . Riel! . . .

The men repeated the name. It hummed like a bumble-bee through their conversations. Riel! . . . Riel! . . . Riel! . . . The women scattered it through their chatter. Riel! . . . Riel! . . . Riel! . . . Ri . . . el! . . . Ri . . . el! . . . Ri . . . i . . . el . . . el!

Then it was that the half-breeds, excited by the music of the name, lost what patience they had left, and quite naturally, as though it were a logical consequence, stove in a barrel of maple syrup in which they dipped the grotesque, lousy bodies of Snow and Mair up to their eyes, thus stifling all protests. They then rolled these two gentlemen in goose feathers, producing a new and rare variety

of bird that it was great fun to turn the dogs on. After that, having divided up the surplus supplies, the half-breeds all went home.

Immediately the *Nor'Wester* and the Ontario English papers started a violent campaign denouncing the half-breeds as rebels to the British Crown. One eminent orator after another appeared on the rostrum at Ottawa. Copious and succulent epithets fell from their lips like rich macaroni: the Law must be respected; the honor of the British flag must be sustained (this last with an imperturbable earnestness!). And very quietly, with no more talk than necessary, these same orators, with the help of a few business men, made out the probable balance sheet of a speculation based on the curious agreement (God be praised!) between the English and the financiers' points of view.

During this time, the half-breeds, made uneasy by the murmur of irritated hornets that buzzed about them, went from one to the other, looking first to the side and then behind them, whispering mysteriously that young Louis Riel was in St. Paul, in the United States.

They finally delegated an emissary to go after him, and one foggy evening a little piebald horse—for which no idiot would have given five cents, but which nevertheless quietly did its eighty miles a day in a monotonous canter of little knock-kneed legs—headed southward, bearing a rider who, in his hurried journey toward the Chief, listened impatiently to the muffled ta-pa-tap of the hard little hoofs on the boggy prairie moss.

CHAPTER TWO

RIEL walked slowly towards the house where, that evening, Antoine Morin was giving a dance for the young people of Red River.

It was a night in the latter part of September, and an early snow, wet and heavy, bent the still leafy branches, covered the earth with a soft, silent whiteness, and scattered towards the South the geometry of frightened ducks, as they passed in noisy flight, quacking directions to each other as to the best way to go.

Riel was prey to an inordinate ambition which, ever since childhood, had kept pace with his own growth, then outstripped him, until, when he was twenty-three years old, this ambition, become enormous, seemed to take pleasure in arousing and baffling him by turns.

From his father, the “departed” Louis Riel as the half-breeds called him, he had inherited a tall, strong body, square massive fists, a face on which the Indian blood had left only a faint trace—in the cheek bones—a white face framed by a light

blond beard, and finally, an insatiable desire to rule, which his father had not been able to realize, but which the son promised himself to fulfill.

As a little child, half hidden in his mother's skirts, one finger in his mouth and wide-eyed with admiration, he had seen the notables of the country, including some of the most highly esteemed among the old hunters, come humbly to ask the advice of "our kinsman Riel." He had watched the Sioux chieftains, their foreheads encircled with many-colored feathers, buffalo robes floating from their shoulders and wolves' tails dragging at their heels, get down from their piebald horses, having come to announce their submission to the chief of the Red River half-breeds, to smoke the pipe of peace with him and implore his alliance with their cause—all this in a manner that was both resigned and proud at the same time, admiring and ironical. He had even—and this had been the height of glory—heard the Bishop of Saint Boniface, the accredited representative of Heaven in the West Canadian territory, and undisputed mouthpiece of the Celestial Powers, speak of Louis Riel as the temporal chief of the colony, approve of him, praise him, and promise to give his son an education which would make it possible for him

to succeed his father in authority. As a result of which "P'tit Louis Riel, son of Louis Riel, our kinsman, y'know, our kinsman Riel," had been placed in a college in Montreal, where he had been stuffed full of Bible History, a little Greek and Latin, the elements of geometry, and Christian apologetics, this last being a perfectly useless study for an adolescent who already had implicit faith and never dreamed for an instant that anyone might doubt the word of a cassocked orator.

As a result of all these studies, young Riel would have become just a very good boy, with a mediocre common school education and, above everything else, eager to go back to his own country, where he could hunt moose and buffalo, dance jigs with half-clad girls to the squeaky tune of a fiddle, tumble some buxom wench, met by chance, on a soft, fragrant haystack or in the shadow of some quiet, mysterious clump of trees—such would have been his life, if, at the end of these meager studies, the youngster had not let himself be carried away by the wanderlust.

One first of July—that being the anniversary of the battle of Boyne—he had the opportunity, in a little Ontario settlement, of seeing a procession of fanatical Orangeists (following a custom

that had been observed since 1690) unfurl the banners of their choral societies. All wore orange-colored ribbons in their buttonholes. Between glasses of whiskey they hiccuped their ancient, fanatical, imperishable and ridiculous hatred of Catholicism, France and Ireland, those three bugbears of Puritanical, imperialistic Great Britain. Gentlemen who made much money by their trade of exciting public passions exhibited little triangular aprons on their stomachs without worrying about indecency or ridicule. Under the impetus of brutal speeches, and with every passion running wild, madmen rushed through the streets, singing, shrieking, vociferating and ranting, declaring that they were ready to exterminate the enemies of England and Protestantism, and, before the bar-room doors, often putting their threats into action.

Riel, sixteen years old at the time, was caught by a zealot in the act of speaking that "damned French" on this sacred day, when it was only fitting that everyone should celebrate the triumph of the House of Orange over the House of Stuart (that is to say, of Protestant England over Catholic Ireland and her ally, France). He had been first insulted and then beaten. Years later his pride still suffered at the thought of the blow that

had blackened his eye, and his only consolation was in the thought of how, with every nerve tense, he had soundly punished his insolent antagonist.

Canada became odious to him. Rather than live under the British flag, he preferred to expatriate himself, and greater liberty lured him farther south under the protection of the Star-spangled Banner. Alternately, Riel formed and deformed his youth in various states in the Union, working for a living successively as woodcutter, farmhand and bookkeeper, until the day when Tom Dumas came to St. Paul, Minnesota, to fetch him in the name of the half-breeds, and to take him away to a nobler career (as he dreamed) from the fur store where he was working as second clerk.

He had accepted without calculating his chances. At the very moment his foot touched his native soil, his first thought was of hatred.

He spat his scorn of the English.

“Oh! Those sows! Those sons of bitches!”

He crunched the snow in a rage. That fellow Dawson, the “big bastard,” had succeeded in convincing the government at Ottawa and the London financiers of the advantages of opening up this road across Canada from east to west, from one ocean to the other, and had brought such bandits

as Snow and Mair into the country. And now, without the consent of the half-breeds, who were the real owners of the land which they had first conquered for civilization, then defended and transformed by their own efforts, a tyrannical and insolent English majority in the Canadian Parliament was dealing directly with the Hudson Bay Company—itself nothing but a simple organization of merchants—and talking of a Canadian Confederation, as well as a governor, whom none of the half-breeds wanted, because he represented Queen Victoria, who was both Protestant and English.

And so there started a struggle, on the results of which hung the hopes of the two Riels, the father, now dead, and the son, heir to a beautiful dream. . . . Were those hopes to vanish? . . . Good-by then, to the domination which bows the heads of men and attracts the hearts of women. It would mean contenting himself with the life of a cowboy, who, when night comes, rides in a circle around his slobbering cows and who, to persuade them to go home, turns the collie loose to snap at their legs; or that of a farmer who blunts the blade of his plow against a traitorous stump, and

who, perspiring and annoyed by mosquitoes, works hard to prepare a field which will probably fall prey to grasshoppers; or that of a woodcutter who, in snow up to his knees, toils at felling a tree, its trunk hard and frozen; or occasionally, perhaps, the life of the happy hunter, to whom heaven, in order to compensate him for his sufferings, sends a nice plump moose within easy reach of his rifle, thus satisfying both his desire to triumph and the demands of his stomach.

“No! . . .” Riel stamped on the frozen ground (hurting his foot through his soft moccasin, which made him curse and increased his anger). “No! . . . It can’t be! . . .” He, Riel, would rouse the half-breeds, who were already exasperated by British plundering. He would throw them, unconquered centaurs, against the invader. . . . Then, as the victor, he would have himself crowned king!

King! That improbable dream of his race!

But between the dream and himself was the Englishman. Riel saw the enemy, but did not see the barrier. Hatred seized him and filled his naïve heart with clear images which delighted that part of his soul inherited from Indian ancestors.

He dreams of half-breed horsemen, their hats pulled down over their eyes, galloping across the

prairies shouting and cheering as they encountered the red-coated soldiers! The latter, under the crackling volley of fire from the centaurs, fall face downwards. . . . Of course the few survivors flee, scattered, waving their arms in the air. . . . After having captured them, the victorious horsemen bring them before the chief. Then Riel condemns them to be hanged. Strung up to oaks and maples, they now stand out in black silhouettes against the gold of the setting sun. . . . Their legs perform macabre jigs in space, jerkily at first, then more slowly, more unevenly, until they stretch out for good. (Riel had once witnessed a hanging.) Then turning from the grinning faces and purplish tongues, the victor returns to Red River.

He receives from the hands of the archbishop Taché the crown with the triangular points (the way it is in the pictures) and the girls cover him with love and royal purple.

Riel had hardly gotten rid of his thick top-coat and hood, made of that rough, indestructible material, the "fear-nothing" of the half-breeds, when big, fat, large-bosomed Virginia Morin, Antoine's wife, called him to come and have something to eat. He complimented the buxom creature

on looking so well. She wore her smooth black hair plaited in two long, tight pig-tails hanging down either side of her round face, which had no nose to speak of and small eyes slit obliquely in the smoked rind of her skin. She wore a short pale-blue Indian smock, embroidered with flowers in the conventionalized designs of the Indian squaws, and stitched with glass beads of every color. Her short skirt revealed two black cotton cylinders, ornamented with porcupine quills, that covered her legs, and out of these there appeared the embroidered tips of her moccasins. Virginia Morin was one of the richest women of Red River and she displayed this fact with ostentation. She was pleased by Riel's compliment, and deigned to remove the pipe-stub she was smoking from between her short black teeth. She then spat on the ground and said:

"You are just like your departed father! The Riels are all flatterers. . . . Go give that fine talk to the girls, they're certain to give you a chance. I know I'm old, not good enough for you."

Riel protested politely, but the old woman laughed and said:

"Oh, don't worry, don't worry, I know myself

pretty good! Thanks, all the same, for being so polite."

She made him sit down by the stove, which was a new and envied luxury in that country, and one that Virginia was not a little proud of. Old Pierre Ducharme, who had arrived almost at the same time as Riel, took a seat on the bench beside him, before the heavy polished table.

Being very hungry, the two men paid little attention at first to the couples who were whirling around the smoky hall in time to Gosselin's fiddle. The board floor of this room vibrated under the rhythmic hammering of feet. In spite of himself, Riel was carried back to memories of his early childhood, and he tapped on the table with his fingers in time with the jig. Ta-ta-ta . . . ta-ta-ta. . . . Against the background, poorly lighted by smoking, ill-smelling candles, there stood out vaguely a few giants whose heads almost touched the beams of the ceiling. Among them Riel recognized Hunt Morin, Janvier Ritchot, Gédéon Morisset, etc. He waved a greeting to them all. The light spots of color made by several of the women's dresses, some pale blue, some pale pink (Virginia Morin got the prize, however), made the reddish complexions of their chubby faces seem

all the darker. But Riel and Ducharme cast only a cursory glance at this scene. They concentrated their attention on the nice strips of fried bacon in the pan, on the slices of well-browned, juicy venison, on the steaming potatoes and boiled corn which sufficed to banish from the soul all memory of the temperature outside. It was warm, there was plenty to eat, and joy reigned.

Fat Virginia, giving special attention to Riel, served them in pewter plates that were perfectly clean, albeit scratched by the edges of hunting knives and the points of three-pronged forks. The two men spread their buns, which were light and puffed just enough, with a richly colored salt butter in which Madame Morin gloried, and with justification.

After the first pangs of hunger had been appeased, they drank some boiling hot tea, meanwhile nibbling at a huckleberry pie, and Ducharme grew talkative.

Riel had to listen—and at heart he was not displeased either—to stories he had already heard at least a hundred times in the last few days. Under the pretense of talking to him about “the departed Riel,” the old half-breed, stroking the crooked point of his beardless, wrinkled chin, sang

the epic poem of his own exploits. Every word of it was a lie or at least an exaggeration, and Riel knew it. In fact Ducharme did not pretend to think that his companion believed him blindly. When a half-breed draws his bow, he knows that it takes many arrows shot at random before one of them hits the mark. But for both of them the game had a real pleasure. Riel enjoyed hearing his own father praised, and Ducharme enjoyed hearing himself talk for the pleasure he had in the discovery of unexpected episodes and new virtues at every turn in his tale.

Big, heavy Antoine Morin joined them. He had just been watching the dance of the young people as they stamped in time to the schottische, bursting from time to time into sudden shouts of joy which drowned the squeak of the violin. Riel would have had difficulty in hearing the old man's stories, except for his keen ear, which was like that of an Indian, capable of detecting a hundred yards away the sound of a dry leaf being crushed by a clumsy foot.

Ducharme was now relating with rhapsodic descriptions the war with the Sioux Indians, the death of the Wolf, their chief, and the surrender of the fierce red warriors. Morin, who was also a

veteran of these wars, brought the cubic mass of his enormous fist down on the table and laughed heartily. Despite the red and green silk sash which was supposed to bind his abdomen, his whole fat belly trembled at each outburst of barbarous laughter. He had just recalled the time when, young, lithe and strong, he had ridden horseback, hunted buffaloes and made love to the girls. He had grown stout since then, and now that he was acquiring every day more of a bay-window, people had begun to nickname him the *Big Bear*.

In spite of being well wound up, Ducharme ran down on account of hoarseness. The old gabbler was thirsty and he poured out for himself a bumper of half-cold tea that was much too strong. Big Bear, rolling dry tobacco between his powerful hands, was also burning with a desire to talk, and took advantage of this occasion to take his turn at holding forth.

“Oh, but those were the good old days! You won’t never see anything like that, you young people. . . . That’s all done for now! . . . There’s no Sioux left for you to kill. (He laughed at this.) Oh! Us fellows were real men! (He made a gesture towards his belly.) And now here come the English, those big bitches’ bastards . . . (He

spat to show his scorn) . . . trying to bully us! . . . As if we hadn't already had enough to stand these last few years from those fellows who worked for that dirty dog of a Company, taking our land and buying our cattle with what they stole from us on the furs. You little fellows there! You might as well get ready for a tough time of it with the English."

He watched Riel out of the corner of his cunning eyes, to see the effect of what he had just said. It had all been a piece of fine diplomacy in the Indian style, cleverly arranged beforehand with old Ducharme, and it worked like a trap! The smell of blood served as bait, and at a given moment, clack! down came the weight of the deadfall. If the young man was caught in it, it was because he was a leader after the hearts of the two older men. He was quick to scent slaughter and therefore pitiless towards a vanquished enemy, as befits the grandson of an Indian grandmother.

It had the desired effect. The blood rushed to Riel's face as though he had been slapped. He closed his eyes twice, dropped what was left of his pie in the pewter plate, and growled:

"A tough time? . . . Not if we have any guts! Tell *us* what to do? Us? And who are they, any-

way? Damned sons of bitches! Bastard dogs! Oh, you're not men, you fellows, you half-breeds of Red River, if you let them come in here. . . . This is our country, our country! Are you a man, Uncle Morin? Are you, Uncle Ducharme?"

He certainly behaved well in the trap, just like a wolf of good stock. He was not the passive, distressed witness of his own wounds. On the contrary, he gnawed the trap and showed his teeth to the hunter. Ah! What a fine young fellow! . . . Morin turned a triumphant glance towards Ducharme.

"Oh, well," said Ducharme encouragingly, "there's no lack of good men around here. Good men grow here like poplars along the edge of the river! This place is rotten with good men! . . . I'd like to see him, the Englishman who's the equal of a *metis*. I got boys of my own, *sapristi!* They're men for you. They can put all the Snows and the Mairs and the other hogs in their pockets and then go out to pitch horse-shoes without another thought. . . . Old as I am, I swear to God the devil may take me, if I'm not man enough, by myself, to wring the necks of the four best Englishmen, with these very hands! (He showed them his callous hands with their knotty knuckles.)

Ah! Holy Moses! They ain't one of 'em who can beat us, not one, not a damned one of 'em!"

He grew thoughtful for a moment, then winked at Morin. With a smile, Big Bear encouraged him:

"What we need is a leader. Ever since your father kicked the bucket, my boy—he was fine man, my kinsman, Louis Riel—ever since that time you know, there hasn't been a leader. Of course there's the gang at Norquay, Grant, MacDermott, Jerome, all that crowd . . . but they're a bunch of weaklings. They tried to tell us what to do! They're a lot of *Matchicounas*. . . . Us fellows are folks just like yourself, and we need you to take charge of things. And you can talk *metis*, too, and here I was afraid you'd talk educated! But we understand you, my friend. You're one of us. A regular *Bois-Brûlé*, a *metis*, just like the rest of us. . . . Louis Riel, my boy! Believe me or believe me not! I'm going to tell you the real truth. You know how to behave, you come from a family of good people, we know you, we know what . . ." Here he thought it over one last time, then, making his decision, he concluded bluntly: "Are you going to be our captain or not?"

The two old half-breeds watched the young man anxiously, their hearts beating as fast as his.

In vain did Gosselin (who had orders to play his violin, if he died doing it, until an agreement was reached) keep his indefatigable bow scraping a wild breakdown, with a rhythm that almost broke the legs of the dancers, who refused to admit that they were tired. In vain did the odor of feminine perspiration perfume the hall with its perverse lure. In vain did joyous shouts proclaim the joyous intoxication of dancing in a close embrace that gave promise of future voluptuousness. . . . Riel thought of only one thing: that the emissary had not lied, that the half-breeds were ready for a leader.

It had not been for nothing, then, that he had urged his pony along in the tracks of Tom Dumas' pony during that feverish return to his native land! They hadn't just dangled a deceptive mirage before his eyes in order to get him away from St. Paul! . . . A vanished mirage like the illusory fairy scenes on the Southern prairie. . . . Ducharme, who was a respected old man, had spoken! Morin, who was less respected, but passed for wary, approved. . . . All this was true, quite true! And nothing had been lost, neither the life-work of his father, nor the years the son had passed in acquiring what he innocently thought

was necessary and sufficient knowledge to govern a colony of rebels.

Morin was talking now, stressing Ducharme's arguments with the authority conferred by his heavy body and physical vigor. But Riel did not listen to him. He was mentally calculating the strength that the colony could muster in good guns and horses. So many men in the Morin family, so many in the Ducharme, Ritchot and Lespérance families. . . . Five or six hundred horsemen, perhaps. He knew all the old families of the country, and computed their value in the net weight of strength and muscle, knowing well that among these men, whose fathers had fought Indians all their lives, bravery was an everyday affair.

More than that, he hoped to be able to count on the alliance with the Sioux, the Black Feet and the Crees, all easily lured by the smell of blood, and eager, as were their ancestors, to scalp the White Man, to ornament their tents with his scalp and to parade on horse-back—the supreme joy—in a saddle acquired in battle.

And not once did the thought of the man-power which England might have at her disposal bother him.

With a beautiful simplicity due to the Indian side of his character, he instinctively eliminated everything that could possibly thwart his vast, daring plans. From his little schooling he had retained the story of the South Canadian rebellions, and the victory of Carillon rang gaily in his ears. Neither did the name of the defeat which followed it toll like a death-knell, nor did his memory touch upon the sad and heroic end of certain young men who had passed from arms of victory into the hands of the executioner.

He was unaware, fortunately for his dream, that there existed such a thing as organization, even for destruction. But he was already frightened by the idea of reconstruction. Suddenly he became half-conscious of the void which reigned in his mind. He regretted that he had not been taught in school the "Prescribed Forms for the Use of Statesmen." He wanted to see a great reward. In the face of the deep thought, work, annoyance and the numerous tiresome people that fate held in store for him to-morrow, he wanted the pleasures of the moment. Not without irony, he wanted to realize the reward of his dream in anticipation, without suspecting that in this way he insulted reality.

"To-morrow," he mused, "to-morrow I will make my rounds."

And leaving the two old half-breeds to talk about hunting and fighting, he rose and joined the dancers.

Old Gosselin, short and broad-shouldered, smiled with all his round face and his too-small eyes. Then with his arms and pitiless bow he triumphantly attacked the first bars of the *Cock of the North*, which makes even the most exhausted dancers start to shuffle and come to life. Riel went among the various groups to take the hand of fat Véronique Lapointe, whom he had invited to dance by a simple and imperious wink of his eye. But he bumped into a long thin Scotchman, MacLarens, a clerk for the Company, who was frequently attracted to the half-breed festivities in the hope, which had often been realized, of seducing some hot-blooded young girl. He had a twisted, pointed face, crossed by a long black mustache, slightly reddened around the lips by tobacco. He laughed the way an ordinary man cries, as he said:

"It was to that tune that we took the hills of the Alma . . . with our bayonets, boys! . . .

And those bloody sons of bitches of Frenchmen left everything to us. They were afraid of the Russians!"

This was just the sort of quarrel Riel was looking for, and he intervened. In spite of the fact that he spoke quietly, even politely, everybody knew at once that something was going to happen. He touched the Scotchman on the shoulder:

"What did you say?"

MacLarens turned and faced him. The two men were about the same size, and their eyes met in a mutual challenge.

"I said," repeated MacLarens, "that before I joined the Hudson Bay Company . . ."

"To hell with that Company," Hunt Morin interrupted.

"I was a sergeant," continued the Scotchman, "yes, a sergeant in the Gordon Highlanders, which is the finest regiment in the world. . . . And we were sent to India where they had pagodas all in gold with idols of black wood, and those idols had eyes made of precious stones. And what women! . . ."

"You were talking about something else," Riel interrupted drily. "Yes, you were talking about the French and the Russians!"

"Yes, yes, we went into the Crimea! That was a very different affair. The French soldiers with their funny full trousers (He was referring here to the Zouaves) and tiny, tiny. . . . We were the ones who really fought the Russians. Oh, those fellows! Some of them were seven feet tall, and ugly as the devil. They frightened the Frenchmen, and so we won the battle of the Alma for the frog-eaters with nothing but our bayonets."

He beat his chest to show them that all the glory of that affair was, above all, due to him, Sandy MacLarens.

But laughter began slowly to spread through the crowd. Sandy had the reputation of fighting only to defend his own person, and even then only when he was drunk enough to fear the blows no longer. More than that, there were certain traditions among the half-breeds concerning the valor of their French ancestors.

Riel was the only one who did not join in the general hilarity.

"I have heard that story told very differently."

His voice was calm, very calm; so calm, in fact, that it astonished even himself, for he felt irritated to the extreme limit of his patience. Nevertheless,

calm as it was, his voice took on a certain solemnity which impressed the crowd.

“Poor old Sandy dog! Watch out!” warned Janvier Ritchot in a low murmur.

The Scotchman bluffed a bit, and wore a smile of scorn which troubled Riel not in the least. The half-breed had his moment and he wasn’t going to let it drop.

“I have heard that told very differently. You pudding-eaters were stuffing yourselves, and it was the frog-eaters who saved you when the Russians took you by surprise.”

MacLarens’ face grew purple and he shouted:

“You dare contradict me to my face! . . . No, it was not. It’s a lie! A lie! A damned lie! . . . And how can you people (He stressed the word “you people” in a tone of great scorn), how can you people have an opinion about anything that isn’t savage. . . .”

At this word “savage” the crowd flew into a rage. Abuses were hurled at him in French, Cree and English. The eyes of the girls encouraged Riel. The taut faces of the men shared his hatred. Janvier Ritchot stretched out his little brutish head, with its wicked eyes, above six feet of gnarled bones and bulging muscles, as he shouted:

"Something bad's going to happen here. Yes, sir, something bad!"

The Scotchman yelled:

"It's a lie, a damned lie." He sputtered the word, which rose to his lips with increasing frequency. Exclamations drowned out the sound of his voice.

"Riel! Oh, Riel! Old man, take him up on that!"

"Yes! Yes!"

"Go to it, Riel!"

"Leave me a little of him so I can finish him!"

"Get him, the big bastard!"

"Beat him up good!"

"Throw him out!"

"Then why do you come here to dance with us if you want to insult us!"

This was Véronique's shrill voice dominating the bedlam of men's voices by an octave higher.

She hadn't understood a thing in the whole discussion, nor had any of the others. But Hatred, Hatred personified and alive, filled their souls. It distorted their faces, and made their voices tremble in their throats.

Meanwhile Morin came forward, jostling the circle of lookers-on with his broad shoulders. He, too, was furious, but an old-fashioned sense of

hospitality made him feel that he did not want the two men to fight in his house.

"Not here, Riel! Not here, old man! Outside, if you must!"

Then threateningly: "The first one who touches the other fellow here, will get a good hiding from me!"

Janvier Ritchot was doubtful.

"Hey, there, Uncle Morin. I don't think you looked at the Riel lad hard enough. As far as strength goes, I guess he can whip you now."

Morin's reply was lost, because some kind soul had already opened the door, through which could be seen in its leafy frame a foreground of pale blue snow, a mass of black and blue trees, and a dark, cloudy sky. There was an eddy in the crowd, and, as though vomited by this eddy, Riel and MacLarens found themselves outside, face to face, against the nocturnal background.

A few were brandishing lighted torches on which the snowflakes fell sizzling, extinguishing the flame as they turned into steam. Before the bystanders could get enough torches to light up the show they were anxious to see, a dull blow was heard, followed by a curse, the soft thud of a body in the snow, a man slipping as he rose painfully, then

more muttered curses, only half aloud, which became more and more distant until they were finally lost in the woods.

Riel came back in, his voice vibrant with the joy of triumph.

"Oh, the dirty dog! A dog without guts, too! He didn't even defend himself! I hit him once and down he went. Not unconscious. I couldn't see well enough so didn't get him in the right spot."

"Oh!" said Véronique admiringly, in a tone of consolation. "But you got him all the same. That was all that was needed. He won't go around bragging any more. Now, let's go and dance, Louis Riel!"

"Go ahead, Gosselin, play us your *Cock of the North*," cried Ritchot.

Véronique's moist hand melted in Riel's. Immediately his hatred left him. This was the moment for voluptuous enjoyment. After the victory he felt the need of reward, and this pretty girl with her full quivering breasts under a pale blue cotton dress, both satisfied his æsthetic sense and promised him the ultimate appeasement of his desires.

She gave forth a strong odor of flesh, like the scent of game to the hunter. And since he wanted

her, he complimented her awkwardly, as they do in the West.

“You’ve got nice little breasts, Véronique!”

The girl smiled and looked at him sidewise, indulgently. This compliment hit home, but she felt she must reply with necessary formality, so she simpered:

“What do you know about them? You’ve never seen them!”

This was true, as it happened. For many others, and Riel knew this well, had not only seen but touched them. She seemed to offer herself with a joyous laugh and he soon made direct proposals to her. She listened without forgetting to dance, keeping in time to the music with her large feet shod in embroidered moccasins. Under the power of the melting glance of her oblique eyes, both docile and lewd, he felt himself very much the *man*. She, too, felt very much of a *woman* in the embrace of this handsome lad. And so, at the third figure of the schottische, in the wild breakdown, danced to the tune of *Don’t do it again, Mistress Flanagan*, to which Gosselin’s bow gave all the spice of sensuality, she murmured her acquiescence. Voluptuousness had gotten under their skin.

When the dance was over, they managed to dis-

appear, singly. They met in the dark stable, and there amid the warm odor of the animals, Riel possessed her.

When he returned to the dance hall, they were looking for him. No one thought of attributing his absence to anything that was none of their business. But things were already happening. His physical strength being established, he was undoubtedly the suitable chief for the colony.

His entrance was greeted with cheers.

“Riel! Louis Riel!”

“Our Captain!”

“Oh, Riel, my boy!”

“You will rid us of the English!”

Then an inspiration seized Gosselin, as if by the hair. With astonishing agility, considering his squat little body, he leaped onto the table, knocking over food and plates as he did so. His chin on his violin, he began to shake his head wildly, and his long straight hair waved in disorder as he played the Red River jig. To this day, it is still a national air of the half-breeds, and it has the power of exciting their passions to the point of delirium.

Their feet beat the ground rhythmically. Fat old women with flabby bodies picked up pots and

pewter plates, and beating them with the palms of their hands, intoned: "Ta-ca-ta . . . ta-ca-ta . . . ta-ca-ta. . . ."

Then started a wild saraband. Tall, swarthy young men in soft leather hunting jackets, embroidered with many colored silks and glass beads; girls with plum-colored complexions, hot in their gay calico dresses now showing stains of perspiration under the arms and at the waists; and heavy old men in shirt sleeves, their paunches shaking, all took hands and, dancing to a mad jig, wound and unwound around Riel in a sort of farandola.
 . . . Ta-ca-ta . . . ta-ca-ta. . . .

Voices rose, as still faster and faster the rhythm of the violin swept the dance along, irresistibly hysterical, wild and mad . . . ta-ca-ta . . . ta-ca-ta . . . Ooooo . . . hi . . . hi-i-i . . . Ooooo . . . hi! . . . Riel! . . . Riel! . . . Riel! . . . Ri . . . i . . . i . . . el . . . Riel!

The shouting swelled like the howling of a pack of wolves; an obstinate, impassioned cry. The dance wound in and out, in and out, around the young leader, who stood motionless, somewhat flustered. The shouts of joy at times assumed the inflection of sobbing that expressed both voluptuousness and murder.

As the sound of the violin increased, the cries became louder and before the eyes of the young chieftain there appeared visions. . . . His eyes beheld an immense fresco. . . . An entire race in variegated colors opposing the red-coated invaders! . . . Cheering! . . . Clanking of arms! . . . Horses whinnying! . . . Firing! . . . The drunkenness of killing! . . . Victory! . . .

The sound of the violin diminished, and its tone became more singing, less sharp, less jerky. . . . The hoarse voices had settled down to the droning of a sort of accompaniment in muffled discord. The exhausted feet of the dancers stamped the ground less violently. . . . Under the influence of the melody, Riel's visions grew lovelier and less savage. . . . He saw an entire people, an entire people with almond-shaped eyes, and numerous little fat laughing children playing about. He saw the blue woods and the still bluer prairie filled with little smoke-plumed huts, from the Red River to the Rocky Mountains. . . . Gold against gold, the wheat fields rippled in the wind. . . . Herds of horses snorted in perfect freedom. . . . The stallions sniffed the smell of mares . . . and the colt bucking three times before halting abruptly on its over-long legs, lowered its nose and began

to suck gluttonously . . . peaceful red and white oxen, chewing their cud among the wild pea flowers that are like little white silk knots. . . . Ah! what a lovely pastoral life, calm and tranquil, free from stupid money worries . . . and the coming home at evening to a woman's embraces, to one's children, and to the warm odor of good baked meat.

The violin grew silent. The shouting died down. . . . The dancing stopped. Through half-closed eyes, Riel sought to gather up in his Indian soul the broken thread of his dream.

CHAPTER THREE

ALL that night Riel had been drunk with the future. But when, at dawn, he took the path toward his cabin through woods that lay still dark under a clear sky, he began already to feel the weariness of action.

From that day action assumed the form of discussions and useless talk.

He went along the roads on his light bay broncho (*bichon*, as they say in Canada) stopping at all the houses in Grande Pointe, Saint Vital, Saint Anne of the Oaks and Saint Norbert, to enlist volunteers. There were plenty of them. In order to receive the silent and reserved approval of the young girls present, they promised wholesale slaughter of the Englishmen. They boasted of their endurance in the saddle, their skill with the rifle, the strength of their muscles and their stout hearts. The old women took the worn stems of their pipes from between toothless stumps and spat words of hatred toward the heretics. What would have been of most value, however, was some good advice. But the old fellows whom Riel ques-

tioned only looked at him with an air of astonishment, a tiny bit of reproach, even, and said:

"Ah, you ought to know! . . . That's your job, since you're our captain. . . . What did they teach you in school, anyway?"

He had to fight against the doubts in the minds of the old people, but that was easy. Riel had read enough to have new words with which to impress them. But though he convinced them of his superiority, he did not, alas, convince himself. And as he went on his way, he felt he was weak.

He tried to bolster up this weakness with strength, and he went often to St. Boniface where he shut himself up in Monseigneur Taché's study.

Monseigneur Taché, who was anxious to protect his diocese from an Orangeist invasion, encouraged Riel considerably. His constant advice was open-armed resistance to make the people of lower Canada recognize the power of the half-breeds. Still, it would be best to avoid useless violence. The half-breeds should make themselves so feared that there would be no need of having recourse to that very power on which they pretended to rely. The Archbishop, who suffered from gallstones, patted his stomach as he spoke, to dull the pain. He returned several times to the question of

justice in the matter. According to him, the Canadian government had been guilty of abuse of authority. He cited parts of the law in order to emphasize his points.

Though he gave only general and vague instructions, and proved himself incapable of solving problems of detail, which Riel was beginning to think the most important, the prelate restored the young man's confidence.

He advised him to get in touch with MacTavish, the head of the Hudson Bay Company, who lived at Fort Garry, in Winnipeg. "You must succeed," said the Archbishop, "in arranging an understanding between the half-breeds and that powerful financial organization."

During their interviews MacTavish only stared at Riel over his shell-rimmed spectacles, and stroked his long, white beard so as to avoid compromising himself too openly. He learnedly expatiated upon the virtues of Riel's father. He had known him well and professed great esteem for his memory, an esteem that he was glad to transfer to the son.

As soon as the Scotchman stopped for breath, the half-breed tried to obtain a direct reply to

the questions he had just asked. MacTavish evaded these requests. He then played his role of an old man in the most astonishing way, recalling all kinds of things that had nothing whatsoever to do with the conversation. These recollections didn't entertain Riel at all because the old man was nothing of a story-teller, and he was apparently bored by them himself. Nevertheless, MacTavish was able to continue his chatter with the most annoying tirelessness, until he felt he could excuse himself for an indispensable and pressing engagement. Then, much more politely than was necessary, he showed Riel to the door. As soon as the young man had left, choking with rage and telling himself that he had been tricked as though he were a child, the old Scotchman sank into his chair, filled his pipe, fixed himself a good grog, and in perfect bliss, drifted into dreams of the future. For the small commission which he had already received in the Canadian Confederation affair would soon assure him a decent income and the means of satisfying, in a more civilized country, new tastes which he discovered each day.

At the gate of the fort Riel mounted his pony and forgot his worries as soon as the little animal

began to gallop along the frosty, black clay road. Indian Summer had arrived, and the premature snow of the last few days now trickled down all the little hills. A foolish growth of green grass awkwardly attempted to make believe it was spring. But it was only one of nature's bluffs, and everyone knew it. One had only to look at the red, bronze, copper-colored or golden leaves strewn on the ground like a crisp, rustling, warm-colored carpet. At times, a fat partridge might be seen scurrying among the silvered tree-trunks, with her neck outstretched, and full of prejudices against men; or perhaps a jack-rabbit, whose russet coat was already dotted with leprous spots of the first white hairs that constitute his winter fur, would flash by.

But before Riel had reached the first cluster of woods, he passed by Hamarstyne's house and, as always, the curtain revealed a pretty pink and white face which followed him with interest.

He made note of this fact.

At first, however, he didn't give it too much attention. So many serious matters occupied his thoughts that they left no room in his imagination for love affairs. Not that the man in him was silent.

But he was contented with meeting the fat Véronique in a corner of the woods about dusk, when he would go into the underbrush with her, tie his horse behind a clump of willows, and tumble the good-natured wench among the dead leaves. She, moreover, required very little of her lovers. In return they had to love her without jealousy, because she had no scruples about deceiving one with the other at two-hour or even ten-minute intervals; Janvier Ritchot, Hormidas Lespérance, Nathaniel Prudel, Riel, or even others. She, nevertheless, preferred Riel because he was astonishingly white for a half-breed, whiter even than MacDougall, Dubois or Dousseau, who were noted for their blond skin. Also, because he had big gray eyes that rolled in a funny way. Ah! that Riel! She liked to stroke his curly blond beard, and his wavy hair which had not been cut since he left St. Paul. She liked, too, the fact that he was healthy, and could carry her lightly in his big muscular arms. As a sign of her affection, she embroidered with glass beads the entire front of his hunting jacket, cut out of moose skin that had been treated with brains and then smoked. The design represented red, blue and yellow flowers, and was arranged in a rather decorative way.

She succeeded in getting him to spend one whole October afternoon with her. It was hot and they had found a clearing surrounded by aspens and willows. The land was owned by old Lapointe, Véronique's father. She knew nobody would come to disturb them there. They were sparing with their words but lavish with their gestures. And when Riel reached home it was already dark. He felt a little embarrassed at having given so much time to love-making.

He was still more embarrassed when he found out that during his absence he had been sent for by Naud, a half-breed who owned a pretty little farm near St. Anne of the Oaks. After the expulsion of Snow and Mair, the Canadian government, with that stubbornness that characterizes all governments, had sent a certain Dennis, not only to continue the work on the Dawson Road, but also to survey the land it intended to colonize. Immediately on his arrival at Red River, Dennis had got in touch with Dr. Schultz, the editor of the *Nor'Wester*, and had shown him a letter signed by one of the principal Orangeist leaders of Ontario, recommending Dennis to Schultz, and promising the latter that once the surveying was

finished, "the Ontario lodges would send emigrants of the good kind" to the new colony. Schultz immediately hired out to Dennis all the ne'er-do-wells in his party, comprising about twenty young fellows. They were mild adventurers for the most part, who had come to the new colony either through laziness, curiosity, or, like Scott, for instance, out of fanaticism.

It just happened that on the very day, October 5, 1869, Dennis had taken it into his head to survey the land belonging to André Naud. He had no better reason than that Naud's good-natured face seemed intended for the clumsiest kind of joking. To dispossess this half-breed for the benefit of the English was a fine joke, too. The circumstances made it better still. The first Naud to settle on this land had arrived some hundred years before. He had found the place to his liking, and had built a log cabin with a roof of birch bark. He had also made a clearing for a little garden, and it was there that the first potatoes in the colony had been planted. From father to son the eldest of the Nauds had lived on this inheritance. By degrees the garden had grown into a wheat field which produced a good harvest in the years when there were not too many grasshoppers or

too many hungry wood-pigeons. The Sioux had set fire to the house four times and the Nauds had rebuilt it four times, each time making it more comfortable. Five Naud boys, and one young girl, who now slept in sanctified ground, had been temporarily buried in the shade of the big oak trees, after the desperate fights with the Indians. These were the land titles which the Naud family considered more sacred than all the parchments recorded by all the royal courts in the world. In spite of the fact that their titles, like all other property titles in Red River, had not been recorded publicly, the right of the Naud family was incontestable, even in the eyes of the Canadian law. They held the land under squatters' rights, the rights of a man who first establishes himself on land that has not yet been surveyed. Also, André Naud had enough children to justify a place three times the size of his. But after Naud had presented all these arguments, Dennis burst out laughing and said that none of that made a damn bit of difference to him.

Thereupon Naud mounted his horse and, after sending one of his boys after Riel, who (fortunately for the reputation of big fat Véronique) was not to be found, the old half-breed went to

ask Janvier Ritchot to help him. The evening before Ritchot had brought home a bottle of whiskey, this being rather rare merchandise, and the two men decided before doing anything else, to have a few drinks. This gave them Dutch courage and, as Ritchot said, "there's more power than you think in the belly of a good bottle."

The two men stopped by to see Lépine, who was tanning the hide of a moose he had killed a few days before. Then they went to old Ducharme's, and after that to see Joseph Dumas, whose four sons they persuaded to join them. Since, fortunately, there was nothing left to drink, in an hour they had gathered forty well-armed men.

But there was no battle. In his haste to flee Janvier Ritchot's fury, Dennis had left a keg of whiskey behind. This constituted a real victory, and all the members of the expedition got good and drunk, as was their due.

They were drunk and all singing a different tune, when Riel joined them. All talking at once, they each undertook to tell him the story. Their speech, however, was made rather unintelligible by their hiccoughing, and old MacIvor vomited half he was saying. But because he could

stand more than the others, and not because he had drunk less, old Ducharme stammered a few words to the effect that Riel was a good captain, and that while the common soldiers had been busy with a perfectly minor operation, the chief had had other duties to fulfill. They wanted to thank him, too, for having passed the afternoon in study and consideration of "very, very important" political plans. Riel was amazed by the noisy ovation that followed, and they thought him very modest when he refused to be carried in triumph. To tell the truth, he was afraid the drunks would drop him.

However, he derived a few political views from this event that were pretty accurate.

The next morning some unknown person left at Riel's door an issue of the *Nor'Wester* that had been printed during the night. It contained an article by Dr. Schultz denouncing the half-breeds more violently than ever as the most dreaded enemies of the British Crown. The thing to do was to reduce their numbers and perhaps even to exterminate them. In order to reassure the loyal subjects of Queen Victoria, he announced a piece of good news; the approaching arrival of the

new Governor, the Honorable MacDougall, who had been appointed by the Lieutenant General to take possession of Manitoba (it was the first time this name had been used) in the name of the Canadian government. Schultz had thought it well to add that the "honorable" Governor would be escorted by "a sufficient number of soldiers to enforce respect for the inalienable rights of the British Empire."

If this was meant for a provocation, there were plenty of people ready to pick it up. As soon as Riel had read the article he saddled his little pony and galloped from one house to the other, recruiting volunteer after volunteer. At the end of the day he was at the head of a good hundred cavalry-men, well mounted, well armed, and delighted at the idea of a prospective battle. The savage in them came immediately to the fore, as always when there was a question of war, hunting or love-making!

They gathered just south of Saint Norbert at the entrance of the wide prairie, where a vast grayish yellow horizon rippled before their eyes, but they could not stay quiet. First they tried out their horses at a fast gallop, sometimes straight ahead with a quick right about face, sometimes

in a circle. Then they fired their guns into the air with shouts of defiance toward an enemy that was as yet almost imaginary, but whom their sudden hatred turned into a reality. They acted out the battle and victory in advance, and so vividly that when they reached home shortly afterwards they boasted of their game as though it had been a real exploit. However, Riel's authority succeeded in getting them in hand. As their leader, he assembled them and explained that munitions were becoming more valuable than gold and that they would have to be sparing with them. There must be no more sham battles.

At this point Riel's Indian blood, inherited from his Mother, clamored loudly, and he had to struggle to keep from obeying the call. But his voice, which had trembled with exaltation at first, grew firmer, and the most unmanageable of his followers stopped firing their long hexagonal barreled rifles in the air.

Once order was restored, Riel appointed his lieutenants. He named Janvier Ritchot for his ferocity, Lépine for his brute force and Elzéar Goulet for his intelligence. He prided himself that in thus suiting the various groups to their leaders, he would have men for every task. But he was

never able to compose Goulet's group satisfactorily.

The war-like instinct in these men was certain. Several generations of forefathers accustomed to prairie fighting, and the traditions of Sioux, Cree and Chippeway ancestors, had taught them the tactics of a cavalry outpost. Riel surrounded the colony with a cordon of sentries placed at certain distances apart, but connected with one another by patrols that acted as a mounted police. Instructions were given to watch especially the frontier of the United States, whence the Governor, who had obtained a passport from Uncle Sam, was to arrive. The great Republic, where the Civil War still raged, was far too busy with its own affairs to interfere with those of England or to enforce the Monroe Doctrine.

The general enthusiasm made it easy for Riel to collect quite a little money, which was something of an achievement, and one he had the right to be prouder of than anything else in his political career. Having pocketed the contents of the public treasury, he called on Hamarstyne, in his house at Winnipeg, in order to buy the cattle he needed to feed his troops.

Hamarstyne, who always had lots of business, was not at home, and it was his wife who received Riel. When she opened the door to him she all but fell over backwards, blushed, disappeared and then came back again. She replied to his questions so nervously and with such incoherence that he wondered if she weren't mad. He soon understood that she was indeed mad, but about him. Nevertheless, he had always heard high praise of the pretty creature's virtue, and knew all about Mair's adventure with her, which was still being talked about a year later. There was nothing about the story to encourage him to make advances. Yet he asked himself if it would not be proper, out of consideration for an amorous lady, to risk some sort of declaration. He ransacked his memory for the course to follow. He remembered having once seen a Frenchman kiss a woman's hand and he no longer considered this gesture as strange as he had considered it at the time. He gulped twice before he could make up his mind to take one of her hands, which was given him quite freely, and raise it to his lips. Mrs. Hamarstyne lost her voice at first, then suddenly became very pale. Her eyes became sightless for an instant as though lost in a dream, then they filled with tears. Red splotches

disfigured her cheeks, and Riel noticed that her breast was heaving under her blouse.

She hid her face as she said to him:

“I loathe you.”

He didn’t believe a word of it, but pretended to be leaving. She called him back immediately.

“No, I don’t loathe you. . . .” (He noticed for the first time that she had a sweet, gentle voice.) “But . . . but . . . Oh! my God! . . . I would give anything if you had never set foot here. Oh! I am mad! . . . Tell me I am mad, and that will heal me! Oh! Lord! Lord! What will He (Riel understood that this He meant the Lord) . . . What will He think of His creature! . . . And a Catholic, too. (Remorse trembled more poignantly in her voice.) A Catholic. . . . It’s a disgrace . . . an awful disgrace. . . .”

Despite her remorse and shame she was perhaps not so near to fainting as she seemed. Nevertheless, Riel felt it was absolutely necessary for him to support her and he very awkwardly put his arms about her. She leaned against him and their lips touched. Then, after kissing him madly, she burst into tears.

He tried to console her, as is the custom, but she gently pushed him away. Freeing herself, she

sat down on a chair and hid her face in her hands.

"Go away," she cried between her sobs. "Go away and don't lead me into temptation again. . . . My husband won't be home until to-morrow. . . . Come back this evening . . . late."

Riel, who was still taken aback by this conclusion, which the beginning of the sentence had seemed to deny, promised to return.

Voluptuous desire sent a thrill through Riel, making him feel lazy, and so for the rest of that late afternoon, he turned over his duties of chief to his lieutenants. His only thought now was anticipation of the hours he was going to pass with Mrs. Hamarstyne. At the same time there awakened in him something new that prattled like a little child. For up till now his conception of love had been simple to the point of brutality. Never before had he felt the need of tenderness mingled with sensuality. But to-day he experienced a desire that was virginal, almost pure. He would have liked to embrace this woman with the gentle eyes very tenderly, and let his too weary head, with its pre-occupations and ambitious hopes, rest on her beautiful breast. Suddenly something tugged at his heart. It annoyed him that she should be mar-

ried, and he became frightfully jealous of the husband. And yet, some latent will-power within him drove from his heart the sin of desiring the death of his rival. This effort rewarded him with a certain relief.

The night was pitch dark and overhung with a thick fog when he arrived at the home of his beloved. She had been listening for his expected foot-fall and she gently opened the door. She had taken the precaution to blow out the lamp and, in order to guide him through the darkness, took his hand. His own hand was nervous and trembling, and in his grasp, hers, too, throbbed and burned. As soon as Mrs. Hamarstyne had closed the door she drew him to her and fairly drank his lips. He heard his heart beating in fast sharp beats. With his lips clinging to her beloved lips, he understood for a moment all his superiority over the other half-breeds. He alone among them had tasted such love as this and pride mingled with his desire as the kiss became longer and longer. She drank it in with all her being. Just when Riel felt he was about to suffocate, she started back with a deep sigh. Riel saw nothing in that sigh but love; but she was already feeling the bitterness of repentance, and when, having caught

his breath, he wanted to kiss her again, she pushed him away, moaning gently. He felt at a loss what to do. Here were many things that were new to him, which he did not understand.

He was bold enough to pass his hand gropingly over her face. He noticed that she was crying. He wanted to say something but fortunately she cut short the first words of his awkward attempt at consolation by pressing against his mouth the soft, damp palm of her hand which smelt of cheap soap. He kissed her hand for a long while, as though he wished to bite it, and for several minutes they remained in this embarrassing position. As the seconds passed Riel felt more and more ridiculous.

But just at the very moment when this sense of the ridiculous threatened to be more than Riel's manhood could bear, she suddenly came to a decision, and kissed him madly. Then taking him by the hand she drew him into the darkness.

He followed her awkwardly, knocking over a chair which was in his way. It nearly tripped them both but fortunately he was able to regain their balance. He took advantage of this to kiss her. Then he followed her, still in the dark, up a difficult staircase. By now, love had driven from Riel

every trace of Indian blood, and there remained only the Frenchman. It was surely the Frenchman who, when Riel hurt his ankle on one of the steps, reflected that this stairway was treacherous to strangers, though undoubtedly faithful to its master. He indulged in a brief laugh which the Englishwoman did not understand. Finally, without knowing how it happened, he found himself seated in a chair, with darkness all about him, and a woman on his knees who found it possible to kiss him and undress herself at the same time.

She freed herself from his arms and wearing only a chemise, climbed into bed. Having undressed in a twinkling he followed her. She was grateful to him for making love to her with a naïve and direct awkwardness that seemed for some reason to make her sin less black.

When she had recovered she was sobbing and heaping reproaches upon him. He realized then that she had a real fear of damnation. He felt sorry for her because she was a Protestant. But as he was a Catholic he needed only to confess his sin to be absolved of it. He murmured incoherent words of consolation to her but she refused to listen. He then pretended to leave, but she re-

strained him and once more abandoned herself to his embraces.

It was with great difficulty that he gathered up his clothes in the darkness. He groped on the floor to find her things and picked up a pair of her stockings instead of his shirt. Meanwhile he felt like cursing. She was still tearful. Finally he was ready to leave. Barefooted and wearing only her chemise, she led him to the door and made him swear that he would always love her and that he would return to her at the first word she sent him.

Fifty yards away from the house, he stopped to light his pipe, and he saw that the room in which he had just made love, so differently from the way his dreams had anticipated, was now lighted. He sighed at the thought of what a charming picture this desirable woman must make as, half-nude, she began to tidy her room. He had a very clear intuition that certain of his senses had not taken part in the feast to which they had perhaps as much right as the others. He felt terribly tempted to retrace his steps, go into the house, light the lights, and take her beautiful unclad body in the bright light. With great difficulty he resisted this desire.

The country which Riel's scouts were watching in order to keep out Governor MacDougall ("the big pig from Ontario," as Ritchot called him) was that section of Manitoba which extends east and west of the Red River, to the south of the present town of Morris (which did not exist at that time) and to the 49th degree latitude, which is the frontier of the United States.

It is a large swampy plain, with numerous rush bordered ponds, and from the first thaw until the first real cold, it rings with the joyful cries of water birds. Fleeing the northern ice, the last late-comers were now flying overhead, swooping down on these waters, where they came to rest and to renew their strength before continuing their long, marvelous journey. It was sometimes interrupted at the most unforeseen moments by an unfortunate and fatal accident, which usually occurred in the form of a ridiculous hollow tube spitting fire and murderous little bits of lead. But this particular autumn the half-breeds, who were liberally fed on the Hamarstyne beef, had received orders from Riel to be very careful of their munitions. They did not make war on the birds. They merely watched with a purely artistic satisfaction the marvelous order of the great wedge-shaped flocks or listened

to the discordant symphony that burst forth from those long outstretched necks. They named the different species as they passed. There was the common white goose, the bustard (they called it that, but in reality it was a big Canadian barnacle goose) with its long slate-colored neck that is the elongation of a heavy body of succulent flesh, protected by an armor of gray plumes; the mallard, the tropical bird, loons, grebes, widgeons, etc. And they took pleasure in all this joyous, noisy life that filled the immense emptiness of the swamps.

In the evening the sky looked like an immense jade goblet with a vermillion pattern towards the west. But very quickly the precious object became sheathed in dark velvet, stitched with gold. This was the hour when the first wolf uttered its plaintive howl, re-echoed from minute to minute in every corner of the horizon. The horsemen on duty, listening closely to all the prairie sounds, would pass like silent shadows.

Up till October 17th, the half-breeds had arrested only a few persons of no importance. In their belts they had invariably found letters addressed to Dr. Schultz or to Dennis—who was now honored by the title of Colonel—or to Mair

and Snow. According to the letters these latter gentlemen had found some sort of mysterious hiding place among the so-called republicans of Portage-la-Prairie.

With the exception of Elzéar Goulet, who was almost always in the missions at Winnipeg, none of Riel's lieutenants and soldiers could read, so these letters reached the captain with seals unbroken. There was rivalry for the job of carrying them to him, for the chief always had a bumper of bad whiskey for the messenger. As Riel read he occasionally trembled with rage at the abuse which filled three-quarters of the pages. And as soon as he had jotted down the facts revealing the attitude of the various members of the colony (in as few lines as possible) he destroyed the letter.

In this way he learned that MacTavish had sold himself soul and body to the government at Ottawa —also that Riel's enemies counted on one Norbert Provencher, nephew of Mgr. Taché's predecessor, to convince the Monseigneur he should induce the half-breeds to relinquish their claims.

Later Riel came to repent having burnt the letter which gave this precious information.

On the other hand he learned that Hamarstyne, according to a letter written by Schultz, was

"completely damned, untractable, stained with blood." Hamarstyne had declared himself satisfied with his own business in Winnipeg; he had no desire to compromise himself "for a government which seemed to him to be playing the role of a wolf in the sheepfold." This last expression pleased Riel, who added it to his favorite locutions and employed it in his wordy harangues.

On the morning of October 17th, a very thirsty cavalryman, who drank whiskey in proportion to the importance of the news he delivered, gave a letter to Riel in which the honorable MacDougall announced to Schultz his intention of shortly leaving the Hudson Bay Company fort at Pembina (on the American frontier). The old fox had made his den there in the shelter of a stockade of heavy oak planks, fifteen inches thick and fifteen feet high. There were enough loopholes for him to employ all the guns in his guard. More than that, he had begun to ship his baggage, which was out of the ordinary. It consisted of twelve cases of repeating Spencer rifles—the latest thing in civilization at that time. These cases were to be divided among the Winnipeg merchants, to whom the shipment had already been announced. Dr.

Schultz had orders to get them back and pay immediately to each consignee a premium of five dollars per weapon. Riel, who had no business acumen, did not understand the immense significance of this strange measure.

As soon as he had read this letter through, he dressed himself in the tunic embroidered by Véronique—to whom he never gave a thought these days—took down his rifle, and saddled his horse. He crossed at a brisk gallop the little wood which lay between him and the village of Saint Norbert. Upon reaching the little log church he pulled his horse up so short that the animal fell back on its haunches. Then holding the bridle firmly with his left hand, he fired his gun into the air with his right, and shouted: “To arms!”

It must have been about eight o’clock in the morning. The half-breeds at that time of the year are somewhat lazy. Moreover the ground having frozen during the night was too hard to be worked to any purpose, and the half-breeds were, for the most part, busy eating breakfast. Immediately every door was flung open and cheers greeted their leader.

The horses snorted, their riders leapt into the saddles and the guns gleamed in the sun, which

had already begun to rend the soft, transparent fog. The pawing hoofs beat joyously on the hard ground. Forty riders, entirely indifferent to the gravity of the moment, and depending absolutely on Riel for every effort that was not physical, flung jokes back and forth. They teased Jeremie Dubois, because his Mexican saddle, with its high pommel and cantle, was so unusual that he was generally suspected of having stolen it twenty years before, when he had worked as a broncho buster in the United States. But this joke had become moss-covered from age and it fell flat. Jeremie did not even reply, but pretended not to hear. It was his wife, Flora, who stopped gossiping with a neighbor in order to hurl an insult at the slanderer. They poked fun at Hunt Morin, the worthy son of *Big Bear*, because in his hurry to get dressed, he had forgotten to stick in the tail of a very loud, many-colored shirt. It took him five minutes to understand what it was about. Finally he fixed his trousers with a quiet insolence that caused the old women to laugh and the young ones to lower their eyes hypocritically. They shouted at Hermidas Ouillette, who was always late.

The women were as calm as though it had been

a simple buffalo hunt. Toothless old women with wrinkled faces appeared. Their hair was plaited Indian fashion and divided into tight stiff braids on either side of their heads. They wore short pale blue cotton skirts, heavy black cloth leggings embroidered with many-colored beads, and down at the heel moose-skin moccasins. They smoked their pipes with placid curiosity. Girls watched for the favorable moment when, without attracting too much attention, they might return the entreating glances of the lover whose splendid appearance they most admired. Véronique had to satisfy five of them. Children with round, dark faces opened their slant eyes and stuck their fingers in their noses with gravity, as though it were a ritualistic gesture.

Just as the cavalcade started to move, the figure of a thin man could have been seen sneaking into a nearby thicket. The half-breeds, carried away by their own ardor, paid the incident no attention. Long after they had left, however, a man with a swarthy, freckled face watched the dust rise behind the galloping horses. The face was that of a certain Hyman. He turned his green eyes towards Régina Lépine, the young girl who was

hidden behind him. She was still trembling at the thought that her brothers or her father might have caught her in the arms of a known friend of Dr. Schultz.

Young Régina (she was seventeen years old) had rashly acceded to Hyman's pleas one evening. He had promised to marry her, but of course with no intention of keeping his promise. He was certain that a breach of promise suit between an Englishman affiliated with the Orangeist lodge "Canada" and a half-wild young goose could have no really serious consequences. The seducer had noticed how much Régina feared her family's wrath, and he did not hesitate to exploit her. First he had her give him butter and eggs, moccasins lined with swan's skin, and those little presents which kept alive a kind of love. Later on, as chance would have it, Dr. Schultz got wind of the affair. The Doctor, who as a skilful politician turned everything to his advantage, was able to vanquish his conscience without a struggle, and far from showing on this occasion the exaggerated disgust which he ordinarily manifested every time things of the flesh were mentioned, he had encouraged his young satellite to persevere in this liaison, which might procure him interesting information.

Crushed by the mixture of fear, shame and hatred which composed her love, Régina, whose eyes were ringed with dark circles, promised to give her lover the next day all the information necessary regarding this hasty raid.

The riders got little out of it beyond the sweat of their horses and the pleasure of galloping freely across the prairie. For the scouts informed them that MacDougall had indeed been seen, but that at the sight of the half-breed cavalrymen, he had turned back "swearing like a trooper," according to the words of Janvier Ritchot.

"Ah, man!" he said to Riel. "If you'd a seen him about face, you'd a laughed. He ran away like hell carrying off everything he could take. Believe me he's hustled off far enough so he'll lose his road. He'll not find his way back here again."

But Riel was not in the mood for joking. He blamed his lieutenant for having missed a chance to capture MacDougall. Lépine, standing beside him, straight and immobile, listened with his big protruding ears and stared south, as if his eyes had the power to stop the "honorable" fugitive.

On October 22nd, Hyman went to see Dr. Schultz. The Doctor was sitting in a room clut-

tered with firearms of every caliber, bales of paper and the cheap hand-press whereon he printed the *Nor'Wester* (expending more sweat than ink). He was smoking a wooden pipe. For some time he had let his beard grow black and stiff, and it made his face bristle up to his eyes, which were barely visible through his big gold-rimmed glasses. As soon as Hyman had told him the news, he choked with alternate joy and rage.

"Ah! Ah! At last the half-breeds have committed an open act of rebellion! At last we've got the goods on them! . . . Ah! Let them wait and see! . . . The bastards! Ah! I'll make them eat dirt. . . . Hyman! . . . You must go right away. Hyman! That's your business! To Fort Garry! Old William Cowan, the head store-clerk and justice of the peace. The damned bastards! Yes! Cowan will be very glad, certainly, if you would give him a little statement on oath. Ah! Those hellish bastards! We'll get them in the end! . . ."

On the strength of these wise words, Hyman went to the fort. While passing underneath the arch, made of stones brought at great pains from the Little Rock Mountain, he thought that a stout-hearted, well-armed company under cover of those

bastions could hold all these hellish half-breeds in check until MacDougall reached there with his soldiers. They would surely not be very long now. There were some little bronze cannon dating from the eighteenth century, which, as they were fired off only once a year in honor of Queen Victoria's birthday, had gained an extraordinary reputation as artillery pieces. The sight of these toys increased Hyman's confidence.

He found William Cowan in a little office filled with cardboard files. A stove fired to white heat created an unbearable temperature in the room where only a bureaucrat could have breathed the air. But William Cowan, in his shirt-sleeves, his stub pipe in his mouth, did not seem disturbed by such an infernal atmosphere. He was looking over the Company's books. Putting his pen-holder behind his ear, he fastened his black eyes that seemed really too intelligent upon Hyman. Father Ritchot (from Saint-Norbert), who did not like the man, maintained that Cowan was a corruption of Cohen, and that the clerk was a disguised Jew. As soon as Hyman had told him the object of his visit, Cowan quickly filed the various papers which littered up the massive oak table, took down a calendar to uncover a fly-specked parchment bear-

ing a large red seal, and laid on the table a Bible, the corners of which had been gnawed by rats. Thus he assumed the role of a Justice of the Peace.

Cowan drew up Hyman's declaration. When he had finished, he made Hyman kiss the Bible and take the oath. Hyman uttered the words, "So help me God," with ferocious energy. This done, Cowan and Hyman exchanged the masonic handclasp. The magistrate then told him that he had reason to believe that Dennis, recently named Colonel by his men—a title which MacDougall confirmed—was in the neighborhood of Portage-la-Prairie, ready for immediate action. The new Colonel was in touch with Snow and Mair, and much might be expected from this little troop. Snow's men had recently shown their spirit in a disagreement they had had with their chief. The latter having kept back their wages, for some reason or other, "but you know, really, Hyman" (here Cowan winked) "for reasons we might probably have the right to think were personal ones," his men had threatened to drown him. "Very funny, isn't it, Hyman?" Moreover a fellow named Scott had hung the chief on the end of a rope and soaked him several times in the icy water of the Assiniboine. . . . But now all was harmony among the loyalists, and it seemed

only fair that the half-breeds should pay for the broken pots.

On the complaint of Hyman, who charged the half-breeds with high treason, the Administration Council thought it time to hold a meeting. MacTavish presided and Cowan acted as clerk. In reality the only result of this meeting was the safeguarding of certain interests. They must be careful, said MacTavish, not to openly offend one or the other of the parties, for the time being.

It was then that Riel's company increased by a new recruit. He was Pat O'Donoghue, whose rumpled shock of tawny hair danced in the wind like mad flames escaped from some hell. And this was perhaps not the result of mere chance. At least, after he had let Riel read the contents of certain mysterious letters, and had spoken ten words, the half-breed was astonished that a rapid and fierce conflagration did not continually emanate from this man's body, devouring all about him, friend and foe alike.

For this was a Sinn Fein delegate who had offered his services to Riel, bringing with him the promise of valuable aid. Riel attached him to his person, and the half-breeds took to calling the newcomer Pat O'Cork.

CHAPTER FOUR

Mgr. TACHÉ offered Louis Riel a second cup of coffee. While the Archbishop poured the weak, pale liquid that was strong enough for his own stomach into a heavy gold-rimmed china cup, the half-breed glanced at the disordered books lying on the shelves. It annoyed him to see only books on theology, or monographs on Catholic families of Lower Canada. The only interesting book, Riel decided, was a curious sketch of the Northwest, which the prelate had just published, and in which he had collected a few of his experiences as a missionary. The young chieftain had hoped to find there some book which might help him in his task. But he decided that Mgr. Taché, like his former teachers in Montreal, had nothing at all that would help him to develop political skill.

Riel's enthusiasm of the first days had somewhat cooled, and now pride alone sustained him in his task, which appeared more difficult each day. Only Elzéar Goulet was able at times to help him with advice, and Lépine and Ritchot, although

animated by a hatred that was strong enough to make them capable of stubborn resistance to the end, lacked intelligence. The rest were good enough fellows who wanted only to fight. But as they understood nothing about scientific warfare which was entirely different from Indian fighting, they were beginning to lose interest in the soldier's calling. Thus they had no idea, as did their chief, of the difficulties of fighting a power which was distant, to be sure, but which was well organized and well supplied with brave, crafty, well-trained men who were adepts in the art of politics. He would have to do something more than talk to prevent the half-breeds from falling back into their natural indifference.

For this reason Riel went that day to ask Mgr. Taché to call France's attention to the efforts of the half-breeds.

His naiveté made the prelate smile at first, then put him in a bad humor. Mgr. Taché was quite disposed to pardon France for having, in an hour of humiliation and misery, signed the treaty which surrendered Canada and its inhabitants to England. That had been a simple incident in the game of war, and God, who is also called Sabaoth, that is to say, God of armies, might some fine day turn

the luck in favor of France. He would doubtless have done it, but how could one forget that the unfortunate mother-country had been guilty in 1789 of rebellion against divine right. At this moment, Mgr. Taché paused as usual to say a mental Pater Noster in memory of King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette. . . . Doubtless God meant to chastise France for having, between 1789 and 1815, pampered first the Republic, and then the Usurper. He was astonished that, deaf to the warnings of Heaven, the unfortunate country should have aggravated its crime in 1830, and later on in 1848. Mgr. Taché deplored the Italian expedition and the help given the carbonari against Catholic Austria. . . . And what about the complicity which had permitted the House of Savoy to plunder the Church of its temporal goods?

Mgr. Taché rubbed his stomach with his left hand, while, with his right hand, he waved Riel's arguments aside with the gesture of a man driving off annoying and venomous insects.

"But my poor Riel . . . just consider! What you say there has no common sense. France! . . . Little does she care for you. Nobody knows we exist! . . . Prince Rupert's Land? Central

Canada? The West? They're nothing but white spots on a map, with the notation—very convenient for the geographers it is, too—‘unexplored.’”

“But Monseigneur. . . .”

“And do you imagine that Emperor Napoleon III is going to quarrel with his English friends for you? . . . Tell me first of all what chance you have of winning.”

“But you, yourself. . . .”

“I! I advised you to show your teeth . . . and to avoid biting.”

“O'Donoghue. . . .”

“He can go to the devil! . . . Excuse me, Lord! the expression escaped me. . . . That's your fault, Riel. Go to . . . the other end of the world with your darned O'Donoghue!”

Mgr. Taché thought of all the trouble he had had with the members of the American Episcopate, who were usually Irish.

“Monseigneur! O'Donoghue is a useful man. He has promised me the aid of all the Irish in Ontario and the United States. The *Sinn-Fein*. . . .”

“Ah! upon my word! to the devil with your Fenians! That's positively all I wish them.”

"They're Catholics. . . ."

"They're thieves!"

"Monseigneur, look here, the thing is simple enough. I will put up a resistance. . . . The English will send troops. . . . The Fenians are ready to dispute their passage through Ontario. . . . Lower Canada can easily revolt, Ireland will follow the movement, and France has only to say the word. . . ."

"Yes, and we would be linking our destinies with those of the despoilers of Our Holy Father the Pope. I thought you were a better Catholic. . . ."

Riel tried to keep his temper.

"I am astonished, Monseigneur, that you should prefer the heretic to the Catholic, even a bad Catholic; or that you should prefer the Englishman to the Frenchman or the Irishman."

"I am in charge of souls. I must keep you away from rottenness. Now, now, my dear Riel, let's not argue! Good-by. I am leaving for Rome to-morrow. . . ."

And so Mgr. Taché was abandoning him! Riel went slowly home, brooding over his disappointment. Seated on his bed, he wept for a long time.

On All Souls' Day, the sun rose in a soft red ball of mist. In order to satisfy the desire of his men, and at the request of the missionaries, Riel reluctantly reduced the number of his scouts. He could not accept the idea that God would take care of the army, and he quoted the proverb: God helps those who help themselves.

Events proved him to be right. At the very moment when Father Ritchot came to reprimand him severely for his "lack of faith," his scouts brought him a big, stout, chubby fellow who was square-shouldered, thick-set, a little antediluvian in appearance, bristling with side-burns in the Austrian style, and wearing large gold-rimmed spectacles through which he peered with profound amazement. When MacDugg, who had taken him in tow, jokingly advised them not to let the pregnant women look at "his dirty Judas face," the monster, using the thick, drawling French of Lower Canada, protested, in a bubble of language that seemed inexhaustible, against the arrest of a Bishop's nephew.

"I am Môssieur. (He emphasized the word môssieur with the obvious intention of revealing his contempt for his interlocutors.) I am Môssieur Norbert Provenchah, nephew of the late Mon-

seigneur Provenchah, your former Bishop! Your former Bishop."

"Oh, shut up!" cried Janvier Ritchot, impatiently. "Shut up. . . . You give us a pain. . . . You Môssieur, you was only a nephew; while us, why, we were the children of the late Monseigneur, your uncle. . . . You're bothering us, I tell you. . . . Don't be afeard of the ice, man. Your dead uncle the Monseigneur wouldn't never have made himself the dog of pagan heretics like you! . . ."

"But I'm tellin' you I'm Môssieur Norbert Provenchah. . . . I'm telling you I'm Môssieur Norbert Provenchah. . . ."

He would surely have continued for hours to repeat his name, if big-bellied, bearded, jovial Father Ritchot, his nose covered with warts and his cassock disorderly and dirty, hadn't come along.

He was the only priest who frankly sided with the half-breeds, and he fulminated each Sunday from his pulpit against "those Ontario swine," despite the repeated calls to order that Mgr. Taché had sent him, though without much conviction. In a waggish tone he answered the greeting of Môssieur Norbert Provencher.

"O, well! Since your name's Norbert, it's only just that you should stop at Saint-Norbert to ask your Patron Saint not to let the Holy Ghost forget you between now and Whitsuntide. Because later on it would be too late. Ha! ha! ha! Well, young fellow. . . . It's a rotten business. . . . I'm going to say a mass which you will attend, and I'm going to preach a grand sermon for you swine from Ontario. *Margaritas ante porcos!* . . . To-night they'll take you back to your swine of a MacDougall and you'll repeat to him and to the other Ontario swine the text of my sermon. . . . It'll do them good. . . . Ha! ha! . . . It won't hurt those rotten heretical dogs to hear a little bit of truth. . . . And it won't hurt you, Môssieur Norbert Provenchah! . . . No hard feelings, young fellow. . . . No hard feelings."

Having had the discipline of a deeply religious upbringing, the "young fellow" lowered his head and took the priest's insults without flinching. It was a striking example of good training. Surrounded by two chaps whom his stature impressed as little as his "Môssieur," the prisoner was led to the place of honor. The more curious stared at him so that Beaupré, the beadle, found it necessary to remind certain of them that it was not

proper to turn one's head in church while in God's presence.

"The young Môssieur" jumped a foot in the air when they began singing the usual chants. The youngest among the half-breeds sang them in French, while the older ones had never gotten out of the habit of singing them in Cree. This bilingual cacophony had certainly nothing about it which could displease the Lord, who hears many others quite as bad. As for the performers, they sang so loud that they were unable to hear each other. But "the young Môssieur" thought his last hour had come and he became very pale. Father Ritchot, who was a good man at heart, mistook the reason for the young man's evident uneasiness and had a choir-boy take him a little sacramental wine along with an invitation to lunch with him and Riel after mass. Generously enough, too, the priest pushed amiability to the point of abbreviating his usually very long sermon. In order to do this he left out the comments on the Gospel of the day and reduced his sermon to a volley of truths, that were both biting and savory, concerning the Ontario Orangeists (whom he called nothing less than swine). He attacked Governor MacDougall, and the surveyors who came ahead

of time to take an inventory of the goods of the poor in order to distribute them among those thieving dogs, the English in Ontario.

During lunch, which was abundant and simple, Môssieur Norbert Provencher tried to get in a few words.

"If it's a matter of land," he began, as he turned to Riel, "if it's a matter of land, my good friend . . ."

"Cut out that 'my good friend' when you talk to me," interrupted the half-breed curtly, glancing up from his food.

"If it's a matter of land," Norbert went on obstinately, "we'll give you some, Môssieur."

Father Ritchot, who was slicing the meat, pointed a knife streaming with gravy towards the Canadian. His gesture was so sudden that the young fellow recoiled as though he feared he might be stabbed! . . . Riel burst out laughing and the priest joined in the chorus joyfully, unbuttoning his cassock in order to laugh still better.

"Ah! You sapree young fellow! You sapree young fellow! Go along with you! . . . If he didn't believe it! Ha! ha! ha! He thought I was going to stick him! . . . You sapree young fel-

low! . . . Ha! Ha! The affair has another side to it. . . . Our Catholic rights first of all, and our French language. That sapree young fellow there! He was good and scared. . . . Ha! Ha! Yes . . . our Catholic rights! And our French language! Ha! ha! . . . you sapree young fellow, didn't you have any relatives who fought at Carillon? . . . Yes! Yes! No English in this country! . . ."

Father Ritchot had had two teeth broken by a blow from a horse's hoof, and while talking he sent forth showers of spit which the "sapree young fellow" was at great pains to avoid. The priest noticed it as well as the nausea revealed in the face of his guest, and he enjoyed his little joke rather immoderately.

The "sapree young fellow" hastened to change the conversation, and, in order to prevent the priest from speaking, turned to Riel to ask him some details about buffalo hunting. But Riel, who had been in Lower Canada, knew much less about such things than Father Ritchot, who had many a time accompanied the half-breeds on their rides across the prairie. Thus it was the priest who answered volubly, interrupting his sentences with loud laughter and numerous "sapree young fel-

lows." The latter felt a mute rage rising within him.

After lunch Riel left for a moment to smoke his pipe out of doors. As he was about to strike a light, he just missed being knocked down by the furious gallop of two big horses, one a bay and the other a sorrel. At the speed with which they were going, it required the trained eye of a half-breed to notice their coats. The team drew an unusually light buggy, its large wheels whirling at a mad speed. Instinctively, Riel hooked on to the rear of the buggy, jumped in it and grabbed hold of the driver, who swore in English in a voice that grew more and more inarticulate as Riel pressed his strong fingers round his throat and tried to stop the horses with the other hand.

A minute later the excitement was increased by the arrival of a panting horse bearing a wild rider who brandished a pistol in a way that endangered everybody. His excited horse bucked two or three times, and the long fringe of his blanket flapped in the breeze. Riel recognized Janvier Ritchot, who shouted something to him which the wind carried into the dust behind them. Finally the driver, completely paralyzed by the grasp of one of Riel's arms, let him stop the horses. When the stranger

had turned around, he proved to be a very handsome man, slightly pale, with bright intelligent eyes. His face was refined and self-willed. He smiled quite good naturedly.

This smile contained a little defiance, but also a good deal of the sporting comradeship of a gentleman who is beaten but who remains courteous to his more fortunate adversary. Politely, and with genuine admiration in his voice, the stranger congratulated Riel on his sang-froid, his skill and his strength. Then he blushed, conscious of having committed a serious error, that of speaking without having introduced himself. He excused himself and gave his name. He was Captain Cameron, aide de camp to Governor MacDougall and he was trying to force the lines in order to reach Winnipeg.

"Well, gentlemen," he stated phlegmatically, "you were a minute too quick for me. It was well done. . . . I am your prisoner."

He was delighted to hear that it was Riel in person who had stopped him, and he extended a slender hand the little finger of which wore an armorial signet-ring. He then attempted with his smile to win the sympathy of Janvier Ritchot, who stood there motionless and sullen. This being un-

successful, however, the Englishman did not insist any longer and turned to the chief.

“Monsieur Riel, I fear that we will be enemies as long as the little questions that divide us remain unsettled. I don’t know if you intend to free me, but in any case I confess to you frankly that I plan to loyally serve the interests of the Empire. . . . I am a soldier. It is perhaps our destiny to shoot each other in war. . . . But that will not prevent me from declaring to you now that you are a determined man. . . . Yes, Monsieur! . . . a sport!”

Riel was won.

“You, too?” said Cameron gaily to sulky Norbert Provencher, as he saw the latter being guarded by Father Ritchot.

The priest approached the officer to offer him the usual refreshments, and the captain accepted them with good grace. He greatly added to the joy of both Riel and the priest by listening with frank hilarity to the story of the young Canadian’s fright. For many days thereafter Father Ritchot retold the story, not for a moment admitting that making fun of the young man was at all un-Christians.

Cameron had hardly finished eating, when Riel invited him to get back into his buggy. He asked him to take along the "sapree young fellow." Lépine, with twenty chosen riders, was to serve them as escort.

The little column crossed the prairie swiftly. Clods of turf flew behind the horses and the riders. Leaning forward over their horses' necks, they made every effort to arrive before night. Their hope, however, was in vain. A little before sunset thick clouds sponged the pale slate of the sky, hiding the light. A fine, cold rain began to fall, wetting their hands, which held the bridles, and making the horses' damp skins shiver from something more than the goading of the spurs. Then the ever increasing darkness was transformed into white opacity, for a soggy snow began sliding down invisible and parallel wires, padding the earth with a felt-like silence.

Suddenly a dark mass loomed up before the riders. It seemed to cut a black hole lengthwise in the falling snow. Above this dark hole a halo of sifted, muffled light crowned Fort Pembina with a vaporous cupola, tinted with gold lacquer and transparent mauve, the whole stippled with dancing silver.

In a low voice, Lépine gave the command.

“Halt!”

The column stopped.

Followed by Hunt Morin, Lépine, who had dismounted, approached the door and knocked. To his great surprise, when his knuckles struck the door it swung open, being held shut on the inside only by a small snow drift. He suppressed an exclamation of joy, for he realized that a lazy guard had preferred warming himself before the fire instead of finding out if the door was well bolted. Opening it noiselessly he immediately saw that there was no sentinel. He did not yet know that through an exaggerated sense of security, the honorable MacDougall had sent “Colonel” Dennis the greater part of his men and clerks from the fort, and that those men were now on the way to Portage-la-Prairie.

As soon as he realized how poorly the fort was protected, a mad idea popped into his head. He leaned down and whispered a few words into Hunt Morin’s ear, to which the latter replied with an affirmative nod of the head. Then without waiting for the reinforcements which he had sent for, Lépine, counting on a surprise attack, grasped his pistols and entered the fort quietly, alone.

The large hall with its walls of barked oak logs which had been squared with an axe, was heated by an enormous stove round which were gathered the occupants of the fort. There were fifteen in all, lounging in armchairs, smoking and talking.

At Lépine's entrance all the heads turned towards him with a simultaneous motion that was really comic. He was astonished, in fact, not to hear the click of the automatic mechanism which caused the fifteen lower jaws to drop at the same moment.

"Phew!" he exclaimed irreverently. "It stinks of fried pig's feet in here!"

Then all at once, to frighten them, he cried:

"Hands up!"

Behind him his comrades were already swarming into the hall. The honorable MacDougall turned a livid face toward them and he stammered:

"In the Queen's name, gentlemen . . ."

"In the devil's name," interrupted Lépine, "and let him take your old hag along with him. . . . As for me, I'm speaking here in the name of the *metis* of Red River, and I'm going to throw you out into the snow. . . . Get your things ready,

Mister Governor, for I'm taking possession of this here fort in the name of myself, who's worth two of you. Do you hear me, Mister MacDonothing? And that's that!"

"Well, I'll be damned!" spat MacDougall.

The tobacco in his pipe turned suddenly acrid, burning his throat.

"I don't want much because I'm a good Christian," Lépine growled. "Get the hell out of here and may God have mercy on you."

But MacDougall asked weakly:

"What are you going to do with me?"

"I'm not going to put you on dried meat, believe me. But Emerson isn't very far from hereabouts. It's on the other side of the frontier. I'm going to give you back your horses. Pack up your duds. I'll have you escorted out of our country. . . . For this is ours, this country is. . . . And if you don't know it, I'll learn it to you. . . . And don't come back, either. Saint Pardon's Day don't come every day."

Late that night, a messenger whose horse was half foundered, knocked loudly at the door of the dirty little cabin where Riel was sleeping. Describing the scene with the aid of his long, brown, agile

fingers, he told Riel how Governor MacDougall and his friends—including the clerk of the Company Fort—had crossed the frontier with the Northwest blizzard howling about their heads. Lépine had organized the taking over of the fort (the messenger took a long swallow) and had distributed the provisions it contained among the half-breeds.

Riel, who was half-clad, threw a few well dried logs on the fire as he listened. At the same time he kept his visitor's mouth watering with big bumpers of acrid tea to which he added bad whiskey.

"Oh! Oh!" he said joyously. "That's fine, my boy. We can enter those forts easy enough. If you are men you'll see what's going to happen tomorrow at Fort Garry."

The other yawned indifferently.

"It's not impossible," he said.

"No, it's not impossible, and even if it was, we'll do it just the same, as Emperor Napoleon said. Stretch yourself out on my bed and get some sleep. I'm going to get everything ready. And not a damned word of this to anyone or I'll murder you!"

Riel went out shivering because of the cold. It

had stopped snowing now and a distant aurora borealis danced against the clear northern sky. Luminous, pulsing fringes of light stained the transparent silk of the sky, which was ultramarine at its zenith and green and golden above the borealis. A slight, almost silvery hem ran like a festoon from East to West. Hoarfrost glittered like amethysts in the night. The half-breed breathed the revivifying air into his lungs. Far away to the West, beyond the willow grove which made the blue felt carpet of the snow bristle with black quills, a wolf howled in a tone of plaintive defiance. Riel felt a certain kinship with this creature that wailed for those lost rights of which the first approach of civilization had robbed him.

The light of the lantern danced in purple reflections on the frost of the walls. A little pony turned toward its master with eyes of passive supplication.

"My poor lil' cayuse," Riel said, scratching it behind the ears, "we've got work to do to-night! When those dirty English are in hell, I'll get you a nice stable, nice and warm, and you'll live in fresh hay and clover up to your belly. But now you've got to help your master."

With the curry-comb he carefully scraped off

the dung that dirtied the buttocks of the grave little animal. Then he picked up a bucket whose rope was stiff and encrusted with ice, and went to the well. He lifted the straw mat which protected the opening, but in spite of it, the well was frozen. He had to break the ice with a long pole before he could plunge the pail into the water. Feverishly he drank a swallow from the bucket, although the cold metal burned his lips. But his hatred burned him still more, and having watered his horse, he saddled it, and rode off to wake up his most reliable men.

It was hardly eight o'clock on the morning of November second. The yawning sulky clerk had just opened the big gate of Fort Garry, when Riel entered unconcernedly, followed by Janvier Ritchot and Elzéar Goulet. All three bargained a long time about a quantity of merchandise, which, incidentally, they did not need at all. One of the clerks complained that the political situation was keeping many of the Fort's regular traders from hunting. He then delivered a long speech on the subject of laziness, which he illustrated by pointing to groups of three or four armed half-breeds. They had arrived one after an-

other, and were now roaming about, without any evident intention of buying, exasperating the tired clerks by having them get out bolts of pale pink and blue calico, as well as all the many-colored trinkets, kitchen utensils and provisions of every kind from the shelves.

It was now about ten o'clock. In the big hall, which by now was draped with printed calico that had been spread out by the grumbling clerks, Riel counted sixty followers present. Impatient faces turned toward him. Suddenly he blew a shrill whistle and raised his arm. Immediately, Janvier Ritchot, faithful to his role, followed by three men, rushed to the door. They slammed it shut despite the protests of the puffy-faced guard, whose face became even more so after Joe MacIvor had given him two black eyes with a single blow of the fist neatly applied to the bridge of his nose. . . . Inside there rose a tremendous tumult of threats, swearing in many languages, the thud of human bodies, the clank of firearms. . . . Elzéar Goulet tore a pistol from the hands of Sandy MacLarens just as the Scotchman was about to turn it against Riel. It took two men to master Sandy, who protested with copious swearing that having faithfully served the company till that

day, he was ready to die for it. These protests lasted until Francis Ouellette held his knife against Sandy's chest. Sandy then remembered that he had a wife—whom he deceived as often as possible—and he asked for pardon. Francis Ouellette was not at all blood-thirsty. He had no difficulty in binding the hands which Sandy held up to him. Sandy meanwhile asserted that he would only surrender to brute force and that he hoped the Company would not refuse him his annual bonus. . . . William Cowan, however, wanted to take advantage of his title of magistrate. He flourished the parchment investing him with his power in Brezeau's face. The half-breed took it, turned it in every direction, and said:

“Hem! Hem! Ye-es! Ye-es! This seal sure is pretty, but, man, I can't read a damned word of it.”

As he spoke he tore up the parchment, which later found its way to the stove. William Cowan emitted such shrieks that Riel hastened up to stop the bloodshed. He laughed when he saw that nobody's throat had been cut.

“Mister Cowan, there's only one magistrate hereabouts now, and that's me! At your service, Mister Cowan.”

While the uproar was at its height, a door opened and MacTavish appeared in woolen drawers with a hole in the left knee and no coat on. His glasses perched on the end of his nose. Over his glasses and under his thick gray eyebrows, he looked at Riel, then called to him. He was very calm, being of a phlegmatic temperament.

"Well, Riel, what's this all about? Ah! Riel, I admired your father very much. Yes, he was a very fine man."

"And his son? He isn't?"

"Ah! Well . . ."

MacTavish's features began to reflect a certain anxiety. He rolled his eyes from left to right, as if he were preparing to flee. Then, with a forced laugh, he said:

"I hope you're not after our skins . . ."

Riel smiled.

"Not in the least, Mister MacTavish. The days of scalping are over."

"Ha! ha! it's just a little joke, then! . . . an excellent joke . . . an excellent joke. . . . Youth must have its fling."

MacTavish's expression, however, denied the excellence (as far as he was concerned) of the little joke.

"But, Mister MacTavish." Riel was choosing his words for they came to him with difficulty. "This is not a joke. . . . Just be calm." MacTavish had a really frightened look, which was entirely justified, but which nevertheless seemed the height of absurdity to Riel. "Just be calm; nobody wants your life, nor your money, nor your goods. . . ."

"A prisoner, eh?" . . .

"A prisoner? Who said anything about prisoners? Nobody is a prisoner."

"Then we can leave!"

"Leave? . . . It might be hard to leave."

"Well, then, we're prisoners," said MacTavish obstinately.

During this discussion he was trying with both hands to hold up his drawers which threatened to fall, and Riel asked himself if MacTavish would have really defied public decency to the point of rushing out into the main street of Winnipeg as he was.

"Prisoner? You're joking, Mr. MacTavish. But I hereby requisition the fort."

"By what right?"

"My own right. Am I not the strongest?" said Riel, less calmly.

MacTavish gave a nod of acquiescence at this argument, and Riel continued, satisfied:

"Being the strongest, I am boss around here. You hear me, Mr. MacTavish . . . I'm going to put a garrison in the fort, as a . . . purely military measure. . . . I hereby arrest everybody. . . . And what's more, in the general interest, I'm going to assign you each quarters in which you will be so good as to remain. . . . I hereby requisition all arms and munition, and I'll give you a regular receipt. . . . Come, now, Mr. MacTavish. You're a good friend of ours, aren't you?" But Riel had not forgotten a certain letter.

MacTavish bit his lips. The evening before he had tried unsuccessfully, however, to get in touch with MacDougall. . . . Did Riel know that? . . . He looked at the half-breed, who remained impassive. When in doubt, MacTavish resorted to lying. He came from Aberdeen where, as the Scotch proverb goes: Honest folk have the privilege of taking back their word. And every intelligent man will admit that it should be like that, because we have only one word, and because there are a whole lot of people who dispute each other's word.

"Your friend, Mister Riel? You know well

enough that I am devoted to you body and soul. . . .”

“Less than you are to money,” Riel murmured between his teeth, irritated by so much hypocrisy.

But MacTavish did not hear this, for he gave Riel a most affectionate and paternal smile.

From the second to the sixth of November, Riel was busy getting things organized. He found that he had just barely forestalled Dennis. For this information, he had only to glance over the letter which Janvier Ritchot had discovered on a messenger who had asked to be received immediately at the fort. The letter confirmed certain of Riel’s suspicions concerning the real sympathies of MacTavish. The young captain put it carefully away in his portfolio, but didn’t mention it to the Scotchman. He wanted to see which card the wily old man intended to play. But he knew MacTavish was a bluffer, for Riel was beginning to judge people at their face value.

Meanwhile, he had completely forgotten about love. A new intoxication, that of intriguing, of fomenting, of organizing, had gone to his head like strong wine. For the alcohol of absolute power has a pleasant taste. On the other hand he was

astonished (naïvely believing his task was much more advanced than it really was) that the role of the chief should be so easy. It never for a moment entered his head that he was merely the toy of events, and that, by the greatest of good luck, fortune had blindly favored him till then.

Outside, a violent snowstorm, a real blizzard, howled and roared like countless raging herds. The fine, impalpable powder rose and whirled in spirals before the fierce gusts of wind, thickening the air so as to make the sky, which was really calm and clear, seem dark at a few hundred yards above the earth. This was the white night, more terrible than the darkest gloom, and barring the plains to every human being. Even the coyote, the little "devil-may-care" wolf of the prairies, who is warmly clad in gray fur, stops roaming and plundering as soon as the blizzard begins. He looks for a shelter in the snow, or in a cluster of trees which the frozen sap splits with a sharp noise. He goes to sleep rolled up in a ball, his delicate snout resting on his hollow flank. In the fort itself, which was organized against such an eventuality, the sentinels who were now useless and idle lighted little fires in the corners of their stone-towered lookout posts and warmed their numb

hands. The glow from the fire aureoled them with a red halo, giving them a demoniacal appearance which struck even them with a sort of superstitious awe. When their watch was ended they hastened inside to drown their feelings in as much bad whiskey as Riel dared give them. Then they fell to dreaming, their pipes between their teeth, as they listened to the furious wind laboriously planing the walls. They had the sensation that it actually did make the walls a little thinner, for the cold succeeded in entering in spite of the most scientific caulking. Outside they could hear the ice of the Red River burst in frequent, short cannonades. The half-breeds in a circle around the stove, which was heated to an incandescent red, sat with their backs to the jewel-studded partitions of luminous frost, roasting their bellies and freezing their kidneys. But Fort Garry was well provisioned, and the men on duty cooked slices of bacon to a crisp brown and then fried golden griddle-cakes in the grease.

Having locked himself up in the office from which he had ousted Cowan, Riel wrinkled his brow and stuck out his tongue, as he laboriously composed an appeal to the English and Scotch half-

breeds. After much time had passed, after many a scrap of ink-splotched paper had been torn to bits and flung into the stove, after many curses which made the imprisoned employees fear that the old Indian tortures were to be revived, after fierce battles with pen and ink, Riel succeeded in drawing up the following proclamation:

MESSAGE TO MY BROTHERS

The chief and the representatives of the French population in Rupert's land, having driven out the abrogators of their rights, and counting upon the sympathies of their brothers of English origin, herewith proffer them a friendly hand. They invite them to send twelve representatives to form a council with the French *metis* to discuss means of safeguarding the interests of the nation in the present circumstances.

This council will meet in the hall of the Court House at Fort Garry on the 16th of November.

Winnipeg, November 6, 1869.

LOUIS RIEL.

Many years later, Antoine Ritchot still recalled that Riel after having drawn up this appeal, flew into a rage because he had no secretary to reproduce it in the desired number of copies. Meanwhile, Antoine and his brother Janvier, in order to prevent the heretics from listening to Riel's curses, and bearing witness to them against their author

on the day of the Last Judgment, had taken turns singing hymns at the top of their lungs, for seven hours without stopping.

It was not until the evening that, weary of blowing down trees in the forests, of heaping up huge mountains of snow in places that eight days before had been as flat as if they had been planed by hand, and of sweeping clean the junction of the Red River and the Assiniboine till it was like polished steel, the storm decided to take a little rest. It became necessary, with the aid of shovels, to clear the snow from the gates of the fort for no human being could have broken through the drifts there. The next morning, Riel left the command of the fort to Elzéar Goulet, and broke a path through the heavy snow as far as Winnipeg to post his proclamation in the four stores where it would be read and commented upon.

Mrs. Hamarstyne was at home alone. Her husband, who was worried about his cattle, had left early that morning to search the wood where he imagined they were. She received Riel with a passion that verged on frenzy, and in the flash of a minute made him taste an eternity of delights. As usual, her reaction was proportional to the

force of this outburst of love. She wept and sobbed and had visions of a hell in which the cruel demons who were in charge of the punishment of adultery would torment her. She saw a narrow horizon, flaming with sulphur and the dancing tongues of vivid red flames.

Gripped by this terror, she seized her Bible, and swore brokenly that from that day on, she would have nothing more to do with love. Riel, completely bewildered, wiped his brow. But she had hardly taken this oath when she became very pale and fainted. Riel, who was much upset, leapt forward to take her in his arms. . . . It was then that she found strength to thrust him aside with a gesture. The half-breed understood the meaning of the words she murmured, despite the fact that they were incomprehensible. It was an invitation to leave. Then, with a weary gesture of her arms, mutely, ferociously, she sank into a chair in a corner, and covered her face with her arm.

“Oh, God!” cried Riel. “They can all go to the devil. . . . Red River, the English, and the *metis* along with them, if only I could keep this poor creature from suffering.”

He stamped the floor in anger and left. Glanc-

ing back as he shut the door, he saw that Mrs. Hamarstyne was sobbing convulsively.

His soul was a stormy sea whose restless pitching made him ill. His head, too, was in a whirl, and at the same time he was assailed by a host of forebodings that seemed like carrion crows. He could hear the whir of black wings. He could feel their beaks pecking at him. But when he sought for some similar reaction in his own past experience he could find none. He had loved many girls, both virgins and wenches; young women who had brought him all the ardor of their lusty love, or older women, who had lavished on him the caresses of their last love. But he had left them all without concern, once the affair had ended. But she . . .

He strode through the snow, groaning as he sought the consolation of tears, even if they had frozen his eyes. But they would not, could not, come. . . .

This grief made his first political disappointment seem less bitter. He had counted on the sympathy, or at least on the neutrality, of the merchants of Winnipeg. For up till that time, these merchants had looked askance on the arrival of the two interlopers, who had brought nothing

but discord into the country, and threatened to create unwelcome competition. Hamarstyne and the others were all the more disposed to recognize the *métis* as a race, since there was considerable profit to be made from exploiting them. But they had learned from Dennis of the dispatch of arms to the partisans of Schultz and MacDougall, on which they were to have received a premium. Also they had just learned that the consignment had been confiscated by Riel and they considered this requisition as theft from them. Thus, in a common desire for vengeance, they stirred up the English half-breeds, who up to that time had maintained a friendly neutrality toward their half-brothers, against the French *métis*. Except for Thomas Bunn and a few others who were as little esteemed, the English half-breeds, meekly following the advice of the merchants, refused to answer Riel's call. Johnny MacIver, a Scotch half-breed who lived with the *métis*, brought the news. Riel, without saying a word, listened to the swarthy little man. He was usually jovial, but to-day seemed quite low. But Riel did not give vent to the violent anger which the half-breed had expected from his chief. He contented himself with putting his hands behind his back and striding

up and down the big hall. Then men did not dare to look him in the face, so they turned aside to let him pass. A silence weighed upon them like loam on a grave. But what none of them knew was that he was thinking of something entirely different from the ineffectual proclamation and its consequences. What did a whole glorious future mean to him at that moment? It would never bring back the embraces of a certain woman, who was not for sale. . . . He hurried up to his room, locked himself in, and flinging himself on his bed, stifled his sobs by biting furiously at the rumpled blanket.

CHAPTER FIVE

*David, therefore, departed thence,
and went to the cave of Adullam:
And everyone that was in distress,
and everyone that was discontented,
gathered themselves together unto him: and he became a
captain over them.*

1. SAMUEL, 22.

THE weather began to clear and there was a slight northerly breeze. That is to say, it was cold. The snow made a crunching sound underfoot, and the six-fold glittering surfaces of its crystals reflected blindingly every color of the prism, except indigo. The fort thermometer was defeated in its attempt to register the cold, and the little mercury ball, frozen and inert, dropped to the bottom of its glass cell, having about decided, apparently, to ignore with scorn all this madness of nature. And, indeed, it must have seemed madness to anyone who was not an inhabitant of the northern regions. For through an astonishing mirage the real sun was repeated, both to the right

and to the left, with two somewhat smaller and much paler imitations, while as if with strokes of the brush, huge bands of light and clumsy attempts at a rainbow were described across the firmament.

However, everybody began to go about again, except of course those whom Riel held as prisoners. A special messenger, with a fur cap pulled down over his ears and eyes, rode off, gaily laughing and singing, in spite of the tears which the cold forced down his cheeks. He was taking a letter from MacTavish to MacDougall. This letter had been dictated by Riel, who had insisted that it be written, despite all the "Ah, I knew your late Father well. Ah, he was an estimable man, Mister Riel, etc." which the Scotchman had lavished on him in an attempt to swerve him from his purpose. But at that moment anger and grief were so powerful in Riel's heart, that, urged on by them he strove to overcome the most invincible obstacles, even MacTavish's inertia. Thus, when the old gentleman having looked at Riel through his glasses, had realized it would not be wise to refuse him his request, he had wanted at least to gain credit for good will. He had composed a very pathetic letter beseeching MacDougall to with-

draw from the outskirts of the Red River and thus avoid precipitating a racial and religious war. Riel, reading over his shoulders, had approved or disapproved, and finally found the fourth draft satisfactory. Taking it out of MacTavish's hand, he had sealed it himself, in order to be sure that no further additions would be made. He gave it just as it was, full of erasures and ink-stains, but with the signature, to the messenger.

But with MacTavish's letter, MacDougall received one from Mair, who reassured him, in his name, as well as in the name of Snow, Schultz and Dennis, that an army of five hundred men was being hastily concentrated in the neighborhood of Portage-la-Prairie.

In order to get the English half-breeds to join him, Riel decided to seek old Ducharme who enjoyed general esteem in the colony; an esteem, however, which was not founded upon intelligence. For the old fellow had always been rather simple, and the years had not increased his intellectual capacities. But he was a very good buffalo hunter, and his house was always well provided with dried meat. In years of famine, he had shown great liberality toward everybody. Riel hoped that gratitude toward their aged benefactor would make the

English half-breeds attend the general assembly which he had convoked for the sixteenth of November.

He found the old man in the swamp next to his wheat-field. The snow had drifted into a high vast cushion that lay on the rushes around the pond, and Riel, who followed the tracks in the snow, decided that the old hunter must still be very robust to have hewn himself a passage through drifts feet high.

The old man, who was mad about hunting, knew furs were best in cold weather and had set out early that morning with his traps, to catch muskrats. Riel tracked him through the snow and found him kneeling before one of their houses, in the middle of the swamp. The tiny castors build their houses in autumn to have a place in which to store their winter provisions.

He was hacking away with his axe at the south-eastern wall which is always the thinnest side of the house. With short, rhythmic blows that went right to the mark, he chopped away a hole large enough for his trap to slip through. He did not turn around when Riel greeted him.

“Uncle, I’ve come to ask you . . .”

“Wait one minute, my boy.” (His broad back

straightened though he remained kneeling.) "I've just about got my piece hacked out now. . . . There! . . . One more blow and there you are. . . ."

He removed a small section of the wall and the interior of the hutch appeared. It was a vaulted chamber with a cupola, the whole about thirty inches high and fifteen inches in diameter. The inside walls were glazed with glistening ice and sparkled with frost, but the stagnant water at the bottom was not frozen.

"Well, my boy. . . . They're really clever animals, ain't they? . . . But they ain't so clever as the mink or the fox when it comes to traps. . . . And for housebuilding it's the beavers who can beat 'em. . . ."

"But uncle. . . ."

"You don't know much about hunting. You're not the hunter your father was, my boy. They went and made a school-master out of you. Not that I'm sayin' anything against it. But what's it good for, knowing how to read? . . . Me, you can let me go into the woods and I won't never get lost, and I'll always know how to hunt to feed myself. Can you eat books, hey? Ah! Hunting, you see, hunting, that's a fine job for you. . . .

Hold on. . . . Hold on . . . look a' here. . . .
Yes, me lad, there's . . .”

“But Uncle. . . .”

“Ah, I'm telling you, only the beavers beat 'em.
But let me talk! What do you know about it? Not
even you . . . my boy, not even I could build
a house like that, all out of roots and mud. Noth-
ing freezes in it . . . nothing at all, even when
everything else is hard froze three feet under the
ground. . . . How's that for good work?”

“But Uncle. . . .”

“Wait a minute till I've baited my trap. . . .
Ah, it's a neat trick, this . . . look!”

He showed the trap, a recent invention which
was made entirely of steel. He had purchased a
few at a high cost from an American dealer. Hav-
ing admired it, Riel said:

“But Uncle. . . .”

“You see, it's that part catches you. It's a good
trap. I can even set it under water.”

Riel, suddenly interested, bent down. For a
minute hunting was the only thing worth living
for! The Indian in him had reappeared and he
followed breathlessly the demonstrations of the
old half-breed.

“See!”

"Yes, Uncle. . . ."

"I feel around with my hand. . . . The water isn't so cold, but it's when I take my hand out, then the air stings. Now I'm feelin' around. . . . There's three holes in this one . . . three holes . . . and then . . . in between, there's a little platform. . . . I can feel it with my hand. I tell you it's well built. Just the place to set a trap. Ha! Ha! they're clever, the little rats . . . but not so clever as this old hunter. Hand me the trap so I can put it there. Be careful not to catch your fingers. That's happened to me."

Mechanically Riel obeyed. He was now just the hunter, the descendant of many hunters, and there was now only one problem on earth which interested him. How to use a spring trap.

The old man continued his lesson.

"Ah, my lad . . . you can learn something from the old folks. Old Ducharme knows his business. . . . You see I fix the tail of the trap so the rat won't bump his nose when he swims from below to get out of his hole. . . . I pull the chain on the outside. . . . There. I'm going to put the wall section back in its place. Hand me a little hay, will you? There! I'm goin' to stop it up good and tight so the cold can't get in. If that was to freeze

again it would be all over, you know. The trap would get caught in the ice, and it would be blocked so we'd have to take an axe to get it out. But don't be afraid of the ice! I'm going to stop it up the way it should be. I know all about it, it's not going to freeze . . . not a bit of it. . . . Wait a minute, will you put the rope in the link of that chain for me . . . like that . . . yes. You understand . . . like that. It would sure be all wrong if we couldn't haul the chain in and get my trap out. There, did you see it? . . . Why are you around this time o' day? Did you have something to tell me?"

Riel had to try hard to remember what it was. . . . Hunting! Was there anything like hunting? Why so much excitement, if he could only live happily, like old Ducharme, setting traps for fur-bearing animals, and tracking the moose through forests of aspens?

In spite of old Ducharme's support, only a few English half-breeds appeared at the meeting on the 16th. The hall was spiritless, and confusion seemed to hover over the audience. As soon as the speaking began, the older ones went to sleep.

For political reasons, Riel had Thomas Bunn

proposed as president, while he himself acted as secretary. All his speaking, it must be admitted, bored the half-breeds to death, for they preferred action to reflection. It gave them less trouble. And so it was in the midst of general indifference that Riel, seconded by Elzéar Goulet, who was the only one likely to be of real service to him, read the following resolutions:

1. *Canada has no rights here.*
2. *We do not owe her obedience.*
3. *We wish to negotiate with her ourselves before entering into the confederation.*

The audience gave its approval, without understanding.

Thomas Bunn had several reasons for regretting that the English half-breeds had not appeared. Riel, on the other hand, was glad of it and for exactly the same reasons. Every time a speech was made, the assembly applauded instinctively, without noticing that two minutes before, they had approved ideas absolutely contrary to those which the present speaker now offered. Had Johnny Grant or Norquay seized the opportunity to defend MacDougall, or propose resolutions favoring him, Riel realized that the

half-breeds would have approved and granted everything the enemy wanted.

But Thomas Bunn, luckily, had a slow, irresolute mind. Riel amused himself with the play on words, saying that Thomas was like a hot bun when it comes out of the oven, golden, steaming and fragrant, but which falls flat from being allowed to stand. As a matter of fact, Bunn really was a covetous, mercenary soul, much attached to a certain yellow metal, and the secret negotiations he was carrying on with the honorable MacDougall were not yet complete. He hoped that each minute of delay would bring him in a considerable and entirely personal profit, perhaps even more than a certain sum written on a piece of paper stained with the sweat of the messenger, and neatly sewn into the lining of the English half-breed's jacket.

It was not until the morning of November 22nd that Wallace, MacDougall's confidential man, who came and went in the night with the craftiness and silence of a marauding wolf, brought Thomas Bunn the expected promise. As he hastened towards Fort Garry to call a meeting, the English half-breed dreamed of beautiful meadows enclosed with wire fences and white posts, of a

comfortable frame house, cream-colored with a red roof, of imitation mahogany furniture trimmed with brass and plush, of a harmonium, of all the luxury, in short, that he had once seen in the homes of certain Ontario farmers, during a trip through that more civilized region. The only result of his proposition to let MacDougall enter Fort Garry, however, was that Riel, Ritchot, Lépine and Goulet drove him, Thomas Bunn himself, out of Fort Garry. And he left plodding through the snow, all hope of a quick fortune having suddenly vanished.

The Orangeist lodge of the *Friends of Canada*, which had been founded by Dr. F. Schultz, would not accept defeat. Fort Garry must be recaptured from the half-breeds, said Colonel Dennis, and an example must be made of them which henceforth would inspire the rebels with a holy terror of the British flag. They did not own a *Union Jack*, symbol of the British Empire, since Prince Rupert's Land had, up till then, despised the vain luxury of flags flying in the wind. To be sure, there were five or six flags in the colony, but they bore the colors of the Stuarts, emblems of sedition, and what was more, the moths and mice had

gnawed holes in them, so it was impossible for them to symbolize victory. Stewart furnished the cotton goods needed for the manufacture of the imperial flag, but did not think it his duty to refuse payment which Schultz made from the Masonic funds. The flag was unfurled on the Doctor's house, and, by a chance which was much more human than providential, Dennis arrived with about sixty men armed to the teeth, who were quartered there. A short time previously the venerable head of the Orangeist lodge had had his house enlarged, much more than had seemed necessary for a childless household. The addition he had built offered the peculiarity of being sufficiently thick to withstand a volley of musketry. Moreover its windows were so narrow that they could quite justifiably be considered loopholes.

The very sight of this fortification and the arms it contained must have sufficed to create a warlike spirit. That is doubtless why, on the evening the flag was raised, they sent off a patrol of three men, composed of Scott, who had once wanted to drown Mair, and two companions, MacArthur and William Dean. Neither Billy Scott nor his two comrades, however, took their mission seriously. It was worth while earning three dollars a day with

abundant rations of meat, potatoes, tea and whiskey. All this seemed to them the more enviable since the work was not hard. They had a few marches and counter-marches in the soft snow with a wind that blew a brisk, stinging rain against their cold-pinched cheeks. But what was that to men hardened to work in the Northwest? It was much harder to cord wood, or to chop down oaks, elms, or frozen aspens, when the sap has turned to ice, and the edge of the axe grows blunt against it, to fell it with a crash into the underbrush, to hack off the branches (in snow up to the waist), to cut them up into pieces four feet long, to split them and pile them up between two posts: or, again, for eight hours at a stretch, in biting cold weather, to haul a load of poles that upsets at every turn of the road, or to drive a sleigh which spills into snow drifts, and must then be unloaded and loaded again or else in the dew and mud of swamps to survey the space comprised between two stakes while myriads and myriads of humming mosquitoes take turns sticking their nasty little sharp needles, that prick and burn, into your skin. But to be a militiaman! That would mean singing, drinking and sleeping, being lazy at will, eating abundantly, sparking a girl

occasionally, and sometimes, just by way of a little stroll, walking with a gun over your shoulder as a sentinel without either danger or fatigue.

And yet, that evening, Billy Scott had the disagreeable surprise of seeing, as he turned the corner of a house, the yellow reflection of the moon gleaming on a steel cannon. With a frightfully bad accent Lépine shouted to them in English:

“Hands up!”

MacArthur and Dean threw down their guns at once. Scott nourished no ill feelings toward the half-breeds, but he was haughty and quick tempered. He did not wish to surrender, and he quickly freed his weapon from the strap that held it.

Then MacArthur and Dean began to moan:

“Oh, good friends, don’t shoot. He’s crazy, let’s disarm him!”

And they jumped on their comrade to overcome him. They wrenched his rifle away and fired it into the air. Scott, who was tall, slender, and robust, was too vigorous an adversary for the united forces of little bow-legged MacArthur and Dean. The latter was a chronic drunkard and his muscles had been for years nothing more than soft sponges soaked in whiskey. Luckily for every-

body, Lépine leaped at him like a lynx, and with the butt-end of his rifle, struck Scott on the chest. The latter collapsed, dragging his two friends with him.

The two half-breeds accompanying Lépine bound Scott and tied a tether around his ankles with which they planned to haul him along to Fort Garry, as one hauls an ordinary sled. MacArthur had succeeded in clambering to his knees and was imploring Lépine, who joyfully and cruelly amused himself by terrifying his prisoner with barbarous gestures, Indian dances and war whoops that instinctively rose to his lips and which the unfortunate polyglot Scotchman understood only too well. Dean coughed and spat, his throat being too dry and too burnt by brandy to think of anything except the temporary relief which—he hoped so at any rate—a good drink of whiskey would bring him.

Out of the corner of his eye, Lépine supervised the preparations concerning Scott, and when they were finished he burst into loud laughter. MacArthur, who was even more frightened by the laughter than by threats, thought he would faint. A good slap on the back, however, given amiably by the strong hand of Lépine, brought him to him-

self again. He was somewhat relieved by the half-breed's tone of voice.

"Hey! get along with you, young fellow. Nobody is going to hurt you. You'll drink a few more drops out of the square bottles before you're through. . . ."

Lépine gave MacArthur and Dean the job of hauling across the snow the bound form, stiff, but still swearing, which now represented Billy Scott. The two prisoners discharged their task very well, although MacArthur kept on whining and protesting that he had never harmed anyone, and that they should do nothing to him. Dean, in the meanwhile, spat and coughed in such a lamentable fashion that his deadliest enemy would have refrained from maltreating him.

Riel questioned the prisoners. MacArthur had exhausted the accepted postures of supplication and began to try new ones. He gave so much more information than he was asked for that Riel became angry and suspected him of inventing it from cowardice. Dean spat and tried at the same time to substantiate the statements of his companion by nodding. But Scott, his young half-god face purple with rage, called Lépine a bloody bastard and a damned son of a bitch and protested that no

human being had the right to turn a British subject into a sled.

Because of this rage, he gained Riel's sympathy, for Riel despised cowards. He decided that the jeremiads of MacArthur and Dean deserved all kinds of torture. His Indian great-grandfather would have doubtless handed them over to the sharp claws of the squaws, who would have torn their eyes out, cut open their breasts to throw their hearts to the dogs, and decorated the horses' tails with their scalps. But the insolence of Billy Scott deserved a better fate. Since present-day customs prevented their being nobly tortured, it was best that all three prisoners be set free. So Riel said:

"Don't yell so, me lad. They maltreated you, that's certain, but you must admit that you are not an easy prisoner. Here's the Book." He produced the Bible upon which ex-Justice Cowan was wont to take the oath of the plaintiffs. "Take an oath that you won't bear arms against us again and I'll give all three of you your liberty."

"We're free!" cried MacArthur. His hearty voice contrasted strangely with his whimpering the night before. "Free! . . . Say, Governor . . . let's have the Book at once. . . . I want to

swear. . . . I want to swear. . . . I'll take the oath and so help me God. . . . Goddamit! . . .”

And with this curse he kissed the filthy binding. Like an echo, but terribly hoarse from having coughed so much, Dean bleated:

“Pass me the Book! . . . I want to swear too! Goddamit! . . . Yes. . . . And so help me God!”

He slobbered over the Bible.

“And you, Scott? Aren’t you going to swear?”

There was a certain uneasiness in Riel’s voice.

Scott remained silent for a moment. He clenched his fists so hard that the skin became suddenly white, while his face went from a deep purple to a greenish white. Then suddenly, almost tearing the Bible from Riel’s hands, he took the oath.

Those days cost Riel much precious time. Mgr. Taché was now in Rome, having left Riel with the advice to delay all action. Nor had he received any word concerning the support he had counted on in the Province of Quebec. O’Donoghue, who had left to get in touch with the American Sinn Fein, gave no sign of life. Riel’s soul seemed tossed on the stormy waves that rose from hell to heaven. His thoughts were passengers on a rudderless bark so buffeted by mountainous waves that it made him

seasick. He felt as if he were on the Great Lakes during a storm when the water swells in short, gloomy, foam-fringed waves, overhung by low clouds that give chase without being able to catch up with them.

He understood perfectly that the recognition of Catholic rights could not help being the first thought of the clergy, and up till now he had been certain of their support. The example of Lower Canada had proved that the preservation of the French language was the principal requisite of Catholic vitality. There, again, he had a right to anticipate the sympathies of the clergy. But it seemed that Abbé Ritchot, who was the fanatic enemy of the Anglo-Saxons, was the only one to recognize the imperious necessity of a national awakening, and only an express command from the Monseigneur had prevented him from becoming one of the military chiefs of Red River. This cassocked partisan declared himself ready to support the movement of the French half-breeds. In spite of the duality of their race, they became more and more Gallic, a fact that was due not only to their language, but to their natural tendency. And the Abbé Ritchot, with many abusive and lyrical epithets, lost no opportunity to proclaim his

hatred of the Ontario swine and his fear of being absorbed by the “firm of John Bull and Co.”

It was the fat and jolly ecclesiastic who, before the departure of O'Donoghue, had suggested the terms of the agreement to be made with this American Sinn Feiner. He had enjoyed having the Irishman at his table, as well as listening to his threats that the persecutors of his race would receive the tortures they deserved. But when there was a question of hatred, the priest surpassed even O'Donoghue.

On certain days he astonished and frightened Riel when he revealed himself as an inquisitor. He would speak sometimes with lyrical enthusiasm, sometimes with the cold precision of a scientist, of the various tortures which it would be just, salutary and good to inflict on the heretics for the greater glory of God and the edification of mankind.

At the priest's description of tortures, Riel proved himself to be a real son of the Sioux and the Crees. In the strangest way imaginable, his eyes would narrow and every trace of French blood would disappear. His soul would return to barbarism, a drunkenness, or rather a giddiness, would seize him, as if he were drawn into a dance

around the fires of Hell, where his imagination pictured an eternal torture inflicted upon the English.

On the evening of December 17th, Riel could bear it no longer. Throughout the day he had been at Saint Norbert talking with the Abbé Ritchot. The latter was preparing for the feast of the Immaculate Conception, which he was in the habit of celebrating with a very special pomp and ardor. Clinking his glass of punch against Riel's, he cried in an outburst of intense but savage faith:

"Oh, Holy Virgin! Mother of God! How long will you tolerate in our Christian land, which has been watered with the blood of your pious missionaries, the presence of the filthy swine of Protestantism?"

In his rage his hands trembled. The precious liquid spilled onto his cassock where it left a large, brand-new stain. He paid only the most absent-minded attention to it and continued:

"These men of little faith"—he looked significantly at Riel—"do not know that you make and unmake armies. . . . Led by your gleaming diamond sword, they would drag from their dens,

like Samson of old, the worshipers of false gods and wrest your wailing people from slavery!"

He stopped, quite out of breath, and looked at Riel to assure himself of the effect produced by this flaming eloquence. He peered at the silent half-breed over his spectacles. Then, with one swallow, he emptied whatever liquid remained in his glass. . . . Riel left without saying a word.

Hardly had he arrived at Fort Garry when, after sharply rebuking young Hunt Morin for his lack of vigilance (the sentinel seemed both drowsy and indifferent), Riel sent immediately for Lépine and Janvier Ritchot. They looked at each other with ferocious joy as, without preface, he said to them:

"Now we must stir ourselves! Gather a hundred boys together, haul out the two cannons, and off we'll start. We're going to root that old fox of a Schultz out of his damned hole."

Immediately Fort Garry was filled with joyful shouting and the clatter of guns. Something after all was about to break the boredom of the monotonous weeks. Something new. . . . The men hurriedly thrust their horn-handled hunting knives into their multi-colored knitted silk belts.

The lieutenants called their men together. Riel had to appear in person and swear angrily in order to obtain silence. At last four giants undertook to haul out the inoffensive bronze pieces, which were the pride of the garrison.

At a hundred meters from the fort, Riel, who walked in the lead, turned back to look, through the night, at the column that wound silently across the snow like a lithe, black snake. Someone touched his shoulder. He turned about and was surprised to recognize the massive form of Elzéar Goulet, whom he had not called to service. Just as he was about to comment on this fact, the young man forestalled him.

"Listen here, Riel," he murmured into the ear of his chief, "I'm with you 'til death. But let me give you a piece of advice. You won't be sorry for it."

The seriousness of Goulet's voice impressed Riel. He shook his head and drew closer to the shadowy silhouette. The men filed past before him, Lépine was at their head. Their light footsteps on the snow made a slight crunching sound like torn silk.

Elzéar Goulet spoke.

"You're going to take up your position without

any noise around that darned son of a bitch Schultz's house . . . and then while you're doing that I'll go after Hamarstyne. . . . Not a bad fellow, Hamarstyne. He's well liked in both camps. Nothing to say against him, not a thing. . . . We'll send him to tell Schultz to surrender with all lives saved."

"And suppose Schultz won't surrender?"

"Then I have nothing else to say. . . . You see, Riel, I've an idea that if we attack the big fellows without giving 'em a chance to surrender, it's going to be a bad business . . . a damned bad business. . . . It'll end bad, Holy Moses! . . . You understand! . . . Think this over a bit, it'd be better if no blood was shed. . . . They make good ropes in Ontario. . . ."

"I don't give a damn if I do get hanged," Riel growled.

Then, out loud, to his men, who had halted:

"Hey, why don't you fellows go ahead. . . . I'll join you right away!"

"Yes," said Goulet, coldly, his eyes suddenly gleaming with a starry light. "Yes, you don't give a damn. . . . Me, either. . . . Even if I have got a wife and child. But you're not goin' to let a poor dozen good half-breeds get killed and make

widows and orphans, if you can do it differently. Believe it or not, Riel, I . . .”

“Go ahead and get Hamarstyne,” Riel consented in a dull voice.

Striding through the blue snow, he caught up with his men and started at once to station them noiselessly around Schultz’s house, at a hundred or so yards away from it.

But in spite of all precautions, they were discovered. A door, silhouetted against the night by a ray of light, swung open. A black figure appeared and called:

“Who goes there, and what do you want?”

“Wait two minutes, doctor, and I’ll tell you,” replied Riel in a mocking voice. “In the meantime, close the door, and your mouth too, if you don’t want to be a target for my rifle.”

The door closed again.

Clumsy and frightened, but having agreed to the request, Hamarstyne came rolling along in his bear-like gait, and ambled up to Riel. Routed from sleep by Goulet and told of the situation, he had been thinking regretfully all along the road of the warmth of the conjugal bed and the sweet proximity of his amiable wife. But the question at stake, as Goulet had said, was one of

saving human lives, and, in spite of his appearance, Hamarstyne was less of a bear than a Newfoundland dog. He nodded his head with a bored air, as he listened to Riel's suggestions, interrupting the chief's speech disrespectfully with: "Yes. . . . Yes. Perfectly. . . . I know . . ." in order to let the half-breed understand that he was in a hurry to get the unpleasant job over with.

Crunching the snow under his heavy tread, he turned to leave. Once more the door opened and a voice cried:

"Halt, or I'll shoot!"

Hamarstyne came to a dead stop in his tracks and replied:

"It's absolutely useless to shoot, I am your friend."

"A damned good friend!" mocked a voice. "Hamarstyne, are you drunk? Or do you think you're talking to half-breeds?"

"Send your wife to see them!" sneered another of Schultz's companions.

In spite of the cold, a sudden heat set Riel's face aflame. . . . Was anything known? . . . But he did not have the time to reflect further. Hamarstyne replied in a perfectly even voice:

"She'll take it out of the man who said that, and

as for me, let him say it to my face. Now let's talk business. . . ."

"Yes, let's talk business," said a voice, evidently that of Schultz. "What do you want, Hamarstyne?"

"I, personally, nothing. You're a good customer, Doctor Schultz, and our accounts are straight. But here we have I don't know how many hundreds"—he thought it best to exaggerate—"of men who are waiting for you to come out, and it's better that you accept their conditions rather than to risk their smashing your door in with their cannon."

A woman's high, wailing voice interrupted. Schultz turned in the lamp light, and one could see his beard rising and falling; a sign that he was saying a few words to those inside. But Riel could not hear them.

Then turning to Hamarstyne, Schultz said:

"Cannon! For the love of God! Cannon! Hamarstyne, that's a damn lie. Cannon, indeed!"

"I swear to you, Doctor! I saw them myself. They took the Fort Garry cannon and dragged them through the snow. After doing that, they're liable to do anything."

There was a silence during which Schultz was

evidently conferring with his companions. He continued:

“Hamarstyne! It’s a damn bluff that. It’s a lie and you’re in cahoots with them. How do you suppose they dragged those cannon here from the Fort! In this snow, too! They’d have to be devils to do that! You can’t fool me!”

“Upon my soul, Doctor, it’s true! For the love of God, Doctor, don’t play with your life. It’s merchandise I couldn’t supply. And there isn’t any real substitute for a good human leg. It’s madness. . . . Damn madness. . . . Take my word for it, I saw the cannon, Doctor! . . . One of them will surely send a shell through your door.”

“What are the conditions?”

It was Riel’s turn to enter the scene. His voice rose in the night, so grave and solemn, that it seemed to increase the darkness.

“Your life spared, on my honor! and . . . and . . . that’s all.”

“As for myself,” added Hamarstyne, “for my commission I demand a small favor, a small condition! Oh . . . a very, very small condition. One of you just now said a few words which were not to my taste. Before you come out, I wish that

person would come and repeat those words to me here. . . .”

But Hamarstyne’s request was rejected. He himself did not insist. He trusted his wife and was naturally peaceful. As he remarked, “We must be lenient to those who have just been frightened!” He lighted his pipe, which he smoked placidly, as he watched the first prisoners file out. He shook hands with the first three, who were, in their order, Schultz’s father-in-law, then the Doctor himself, and lastly Dr. Lynch. With equal cordiality, he shook hands with Riel and Goulet. Then, without bothering about the others, he went home to bed, certain he had not dissatisfied his customers too much, but had made friends for himself on both sides, as far as was possible in these troublous times.

But in the meanwhile, heart-rending wails rose from the house where three women had remained. Mrs. Schultz had heard her husband too often promise to hang Riel with a good piece of hemp rope if ever the half-breed fell into his hands, not to make the worst conjectures as to her husband’s fate. A verbal promise was not enough for her. Mrs. Lynch, who was young, pretty and gentle, wept because her friend wept. And finally, there

was an old woman who regretted that the half-breeds were not practised in war. Up to the last minute she had hoped some sturdy, brutal young man would submit her to outrages that are doubtless regrettable from the standpoint of general morality, but which can also be regarded by such ladies as certainly better than nothing. No such thing had happened, however, and certain now that God does not always recognize his own children in the night, she asked herself if there really is a Paradise at the end of this world.

CHAPTER SIX

IN a trapper's hut on the banks of the Red River, not far from Pembina, a man awoke in the night, and climbed from the covers with infinite and almost tender care, in order not to disturb the companion who shared his rude couch—the ground—and who was snoring peacefully. The man groped through the dark. He struck the flint and lighted a lantern with a broken chimney. Then he glanced at the time on his heavy gold watch. After calculating the slowness due to the cold which contracted the balance-wheel, he set the hands at the probable hour. Then he sat down, shivering, and taking a branch of dry wood, drew his knife and began to whittle it into chips. Three minutes later a bright flame purred joyously in the sheet-iron stove, which was the same kind as those used by the surveyors. The young man, whose face was both energetic and delicate, began to thaw some snow to shave himself. While watching this operation, he took off his shirt and, with his lean body exposed to a sharp wind that sneaked

in between the crevices of the walls and nipped his skin, he made a rapid examination of his body, on which he found several lice which he killed between his nails. Then he dressed himself, and, after having shaved and washed his hands, went out into the terrible cold of the night.

The surrounding country was sketched in China ink against a blue background. Like rampant black shadows, the sled-dogs, one after another, rose out of the snow, shook themselves and growled with a muted snarl, their wolf-like ears pointed and the long, stiff hair of their thick coats bristling. But they soon grew silent, and sniffed at the man in an almost friendly way. Minguen, the big wolfhound, the file leader, even condescended to move the tufted cylinder of his tail—a real wolf's tail it was—and to fawn upon the man with his damp, tapering nose.

One by one the stars faded. The ultramarine velvet of the sky rose slowly and mysteriously like a curtain, showing a window of transparent milk-jade green, behind which slid the first gleams of day. The snow was still blue, the forest still dark; but already the wolves, who are the heralds of dawn and of dusk, uttered the melancholy yelps with which they bid the night good-by.

Donald A. Smith listened with grave curiosity. For a long time he had wanted to be a traveler, like his brother who had died at his work in the Northwestern snows. But fortune had pursued him against his will and an unexpected inheritance had turned the student and surveyor's apprentice into a big stockholder in the Hudson Bay Company, a member of the administration council of that important enterprise, and finally, a few days ago, an agent delegated by the British Government to investigate the disturbances in the Red River section. He was empowered to take the most desirable measures for restoring order in Prince Rupert's land, as well as for annexing it, under the name of Manitoba, to the imperial realm over which floats, joyfully and haughtily, the Union Jack. . . .

For this reason he had crossed the snowy silences, like a furtive shadow, escorted only by Carruthers, his secretary (whose snoring pierced the walls of the hut), and by Pierre Lavallée, who was a half-breed, and therefore did not count. He had arrived the day before at the station before Fort Garry and he proposed to reach it that same day in spite of Riel's patrols, God willing or not.

In the east the sky had grown still paler. It was now a cymbal of light-colored metal on which dawn struck gently with a vermillion wand. The cymbal resounded softly under the blow. . . . Then Life awoke. . . . A partridge perched on a nearby tree flew off with a whir of slate-colored wings. . . . A jack-rabbit crossed the clearing, all white, whiter than the snow, and sat down for a moment to meditate, as if it had forgotten what it had to do. It raised its long black-specked ears, then dashed off. . . . A blue jay flashed through the forest like a sapphire. . . .

But Smith was torn from this poetry, because within the hut, whose barked logs now gleamed against the somber background of the forest, could be heard the cheerful noise of a frying-pan being shaken over a fire, and the conversation of the two men. He went inside to hasten breakfast and to ask Lavallée to make haste with the preparations for leaving.

The sled whirled across the pearl-colored snow. In the morning sun, sifted through the fiery mist, the snow seemed pale pink in the light, and faded green in the shadows. In front of the sled, Lavallée bending over on his snow-shoes trotted in front

of the dogs. He made a broad track into which neither the animals nor their load sank. Chilled and closely wrapped in his raccoon coat, Carruthers was silent, his words having frozen inside him. He had a heavy, obstinate, sulky face, puffed under the eyes, and with flabby cheeks. Smith, who had never been fat and who had made the trip like a machine which cannot be put out of commission—for he was a bundle of muscles, nerves and tendons—was astonished as he watched Carruthers that a man could lose so much fat doing so little. What he called little was really about a thousand miles, which they had made in less than a month, through storm and cold weather, and with insufficient provisions. But the prosperity of the Empire was at stake, and Smith was one of those in whom the word “Empire” awakens a pride that is as burning and stimulating as good brandy. It was enough for him to think of the Union Jack and at once every notion of fatigue, hunger or thirst would disappear, his strength would increase ten-fold and he would find within himself the necessary impetus to move his men, his dogs and his sled.

He was anxious to get there.

"Let's lighten the burden of the dogs," he said to Carruthers.

And without waiting for a reply, since this simple statement of his will did not seem to demand one, he jumped into the snow and ran behind the train. The dogs gave a little bark of joy, and redoubled their speed. Lavallée, whose face was like a smoked ham, whose hard rind was barely slit at the eyes, turned towards Smith showing all his teeth in a grateful smile of gratitude—for his dogs. He forced them to even greater speed while Carruthers uttered a groan.

Half an hour later Smith got back on the sled and wrapped himself in his cloak. Carruthers glanced at him with a kind of fright. What was this fellow Smith made of, that he did not catch either pneumonia or pleurisy, or even a cold by running in the snow like that until he was in a complete sweat, with a head wind that cracked the skin of one's cheeks and brought tears to one's eyes? But Smith did not seem to worry about sickness. He was remarkably indifferent to cold, and Carruthers, who believed Smith had something really diabolical about him, asked himself if the high commissioner would be more sensitive to

the flames of Hell. However, the future victim (Carruthers was a hard-shelled Methodist and liked to dispense God's judgment himself) bit off a chew of tobacco. Smith's cheek bulged with his quid which became smaller as he spat tobacco juice. After a while he blurted out:

"Hey, there, Carruthers, old boy, you're not a gay companion on a trip, you know."

Carruthers looked at him with a dull expression which, as usual, delighted Smith. Bursting into laughter, he spat and said:

"Be brave, old boy, be brave. We'll sleep in Winnipeg to-night. Ah, yes! Being 'old Smith's' secretary isn't a sinecure. No, not a sinecure . . . Carruthers. . . . Isn't that so?"

"A damnable road, this," shivered Carruthers.

"A damnably long road, old fellow. . . . Carruthers, your nose is freezing, rub it. A damnable road, very uncomfortable, too. But some day it won't be so long. . . . Wait till I put some rails here with a locomotive on them."

"That's still a long way off," Carruthers sighed, as he thought with emotion of the warm comfort of railroads. . . . "A long way off, alas!"

"A long way off?" Smith shouted. "Oh, Carruthers, you give me a big pain. In ten years. . . .

What's that, ten years? My railroad will make a furrow across the prairie."

"Oh, do you think so?" said Carruthers skeptically.

"Do I think so? I would make a bet on it. I would bet. . . . Something can be done with this country, something big. . . . Look, Carruthers, how beautiful this country is!"

Smith stretched his hand toward the horizon, where the pale sky joined the fleeting plain. From green and pink, the mother-of-pearl of the snow had changed with the sunrise into blue and orange, with a whiteness beneath it. But Carruthers saw only the monotonous immensity, the silent cold, and he sank back into his furs sulkily.

"Ah! Carruthers, Carruthers, old boy, you don't see life, the beauty of life."

"You're a poet, Smith."

"And therefore a creator. . . . It is lyricism that makes nations, analysis that unmakes them. What would the Empire be without the song of the poets, and without the greatest of them: the Bible."

"Oh, Smith, don't joke in this cold! It's painful to laugh. . . . Where does the Bible come in?"

"Carruthers, my dear boy, you're as dull as a

razor after it's cut leather. The Bible. . . . Don't you realize that the Bible is the best text-book of Imperialism? . . .”

“Oh, Smith! please, no blasphemies! It would bring us bad luck. The Bible a text-book of Imperialism? The holy book! . . . Oh, Smith! . . . Shame on you!”

“No shame at all, my dear Carruthers, to understand the Bible. . . . John Knox, whose name you swear by, taught us that we must interpret the holy word in a personal sense. I don't think I'm more pagan than you when I discover that the chosen people are the English.”

“But that was applied to the Jews, Smith!”

“Nonsense! . . . The land of Canaan is for those who apply the politics of Jehovah! It is for us. . . . And that's all there is to it.”

“A few acres of snow!”

“You should have been a Frenchman, Carruthers. Voltaire said it before you.”

“Who's that? Voltaire?

“A writer of no importance whom you haven't read. I have read him. But by the way, Carruthers, you, who are such a pious Protestant, shouldn't steal quotations from Voltaire. He's an odious pagan. . . .”

"But I assure you, Smith, I have never read him. Not a line!"

Smith smiled. He had a rather fine sense of humor, a thing which Carruthers understood about as well as a big bull-dog. Smith frequently amused himself by teasing his secretary. It always amused him to watch Carruthers searching for the joke.

"But, Smith"—it was at least the thousandth time Carruthers had asked that question—"how do you expect to enter Winnipeg?"

"Why, the most natural way in the world."

"But what about the patrols of the half-breeds? The same patrols that arrested the honorable Mac-Dougall?"

"Do you see any trace of them, Carruthers?"

Carruthers rolled two large anxious eyes from side to side. Smith smiled. The night before he had had a mysterious conversation with two English half-breeds, Hardisty and Johnny Grant. As a result the two cronies had left at once with a sled loaded with whiskey, ham and flour. Smith knew rather well the state of mind of the Red River people, and was therefore sure that all the scouts were at that moment grouped behind some bank of the river, well sheltered from the wind, drinking

and eating around a fire. He knew they would stay there until all the provisions gave out, forgetful of every duty and every responsibility.

"Well, Carruthers, where are these patrols of yours?"

"I . . . I don't see any."

"Are you beginning to believe, then, that we will reach Winnipeg?"

"But once there, how will they receive us? Those people are blood-thirsty rebels."

"They're the victims of a big blunder, Carruthers."

"But, Smith, have you thought about it? . . . It is possible . . . it is possible that they'll kill us."

"Everything is possible, Carruthers. . . . But in that case our mission would be fulfilled."

The secretary glanced toward him.

"Don't look at me like that, Carruthers. You know well enough that in that case the British government would immediately send a sufficient number of soldiers to restore order and to make the Union Jack respected. Thus, the revenge for our deaths (which would matter very little to us then) would mean the supreme and perfect accomplishment of our mission. . . . You are a good

enough Englishman, aren't you, to approve of what I say?"

Carruthers' face reflected frank astonishment.

"Oh, Smith, do you really want death?"

"Carruthers (there was a slight impatience in Smith's voice), Carruthers, you don't understand me at all. . . . I say that our death would achieve our purpose. I don't say that I want death. I don't want it. It frightens me. In fact, what you say is absolutely stupid. A dead man is worth no more than a dead dog."

There was a silence which Carruthers broke.

"It's frightening to think of that."

"But don't think of it," said Smith with just the slightest irritation. "We must never think of death, it's depressing, and it prevents us from action. . . . I had a brother, as perhaps you know, a brother who is sleeping in the cemetery at Kildonan, just a few miles from Winnipeg. He died of cold while exploring these regions. He was a man and a gentleman, Carruthers. Still I shall not visit his grave."

"Why, Smith?"

"Because, my dear boy, one should never look at Death, but at Life. For that reason let's drop the subject, please. . . ."

"But, Smith, is this country really worth the trouble?"

"Is it worth the trouble?" interrupted Smith warmly. . . . "Is it worth the trouble? O Carruthers! This entire country is a gold-mine. You see it frozen as though it were dead, and you think it is a corpse that sleeps in its shroud. No, Carruthers, it is not a corpse. It is a young virgin hidden under a white veil . . . a young virgin in her wedding dress who is sleeping. And I, Smith, I am going to awaken that young virgin, I am going to kiss her on the lips, and make love to her . . . just as in the fairy tales."

"Oh, Smith, you're improper! . . ."

Smith burst out laughing, his entire poetic effect having been broken by Carruthers' remark. This heavy, slow-witted man served as a most useful lesson to the high-commissioner. He tried his eloquence on him to discover which words were effective and which were to be avoided, if one is to convince financiers of the advisability of some speculation. He took note, therefore, of his secretary's comment and decided not to use any more improper figures of speech.

"I beg your pardon, Carruthers. I beg your pardon. . . . But this country will be covered

with grain-fields which will wave in the wind under the colors of the Union Jack. . . . The gentiles will sow the grain and the sons of the chosen people will harvest it."

"Then you really expect to despoil those people?"

"Who said anything about despoiling them? We'll give them the place that is due them. If there are any who seem worth while to us, we'll raise them to our own status, on condition, of course, that they become good, loyal subjects of the Empire. The others will work or starve."

"That's dreadful, Smith, the poor people. . . ."

"Oh, Carruthers, for a Protestant you astonish me. Was it worth while for our ancestors to liberate our minds from all the sentimentality of the New Testament, in order to keep only the Bible and its virile teachings? The Gospel is a socialist dream. What would England be if it were Catholic? A country of humanitarian utopias. That is to say, nothing. Who made England? Cromwell and John Knox."

"And William of Orange?"

"I am not an Orangeist, my dear boy. William was merely an instrument. He was the lever, he was neither the brain nor the arm. Which does not

hinder me from giving homage to the Orangeists. Remember, my dear fellow, the fine burst of loyalism which at the time of the declaration of independence of the United States, stirred all those people. They left their prosperous farms and the homes founded by their fathers, and came on foot, through thousands of miles of forest, full of cruel and terrible savages, where death in all its forms—and its most terrible forms, at that—awaited them at every turn of the path, to found the colony of Ontario. The Dominion is to a great extent their work. It is they who saved Canada for us at the time of the insurrections in the Province of Quebec. But to-day . . . Carruthers! Sh! look . . . look . . . there! Look, Carruthers, a wolf!"

From behind a little snow-drift, brazen and tranquil, minding its own business, there came a coyote, or little prairie wolf. He lifted his sharp little nose into the air. For a second he looked at the intruders, whom he simply considered ridiculous and not, for the moment, dangerous. He had only contempt for them. For several hours he had followed the track of a hare, and he had every reason to believe that an excellent meal was not very far off. . . . He leaped into the snow, his

back bent for an instant, and his muzzle low. A second later he tossed the enormous jack-rabbit into the air, its white breast already purple with blood. Cuee . . . Cuee . . . u . . . u . . . uee . . . Cu . . . uee. . . . The paws of the victim clawed the air vainly before it fell inert. . . . The hunter, with his prey between his teeth, hurried off, his tail trailing on the ground.

"No need of metaphysics, Carruthers, old man," said Smith. "There's a moral already made for you."

Carruthers reflected an instant before exclaiming, joyful at having understood:

"Oh! I see, I see."

"That's encouraging," said Smith between his teeth.

He was thinking that his people were a people of wolves . . . but how many of these wolves would die of hunger if they did not have a good leader occasionally.

The sled flew along. To the West and South the horizon of snow blended with the clear vapor which drifted gently across the sky's silvery dome. To the East and North a line of trees bordered the plain with a fringe of brown.

Smith murmured:

"A pearl, this country. An iridescent pearl in winter. A crown of golden grain in summer. . . . A gorgeous diadem for the imperial collection. . . ."

He laughed and continued:

"There are some people who put their colonies in the foreground. They only serve to tempt thieves. None of that in Canada. Business, business . . . and wheat, wheat, and more wheat to keep the freight cars moving."

Carruthers, drowsy, did not rise to the conversation. Smith continued his monologue.

"This Riel . . . a tough chap all the same. . . ." He laughed scornfully. "A novice evidently, but energetic. And to think that France keeps a consul in this country. What for? Good Lord, what for? To be polite. To say: 'After you, my dear Gaston.' Certainly, a consul should be polite to make up for other things. Men like this Riel. And he will serve them no purpose—none. What a waste. . . . Ah! we aren't the ones to let the chance go by, free to disown it in case of defeat. We stand a good chance of dealing with these people. Some sensible advice to Riel, a little diplomacy, a few millions to the Sinn-Feiners and we would have lost out, unless we had set the

Prussian dog on France. . . . Let's wager that Bismarck has more information than the Quai d'Orsay . . . to set the Prussian dog on France. That will come. . . . That will come. . . . It isn't good for a country to be the rival of England."

He clapped together the mittens of his fur coat, which protected his hands from the biting wind. Carruthers came to with a start.

"What did you say?" he stammered.

"I said, Carruthers, pray the Lord that our country may continue to let herself be guided by facts and not by delusive ideas, by words, or by anything at all."

"Is that part of the Holy Scriptures?" Carruthers asked seriously, turning his solemn face toward Smith.

"Yes, Carruthers. That's a verse from the Book of Kings."

"Ah! I didn't know it," yawned the secretary. . . . "For the love of God, Smith, when do we arrive?"

Meanwhile, the sun was setting, drawn down by some invisible force concealed in an almost transparent gauze, shot with purple threads. For

an instant the sun hesitated in its descent and the pearl-colored snow, in a delicate play of shadows and translucent mauves, permitted a few spots of white to glimmer on its surface. An oblique thread of gold still suspended the sun from the firmament, and was reflected in red zigzags. The thread broke, returned, then broke definitely; and the sun, carried down by its weight, tumbled heavily into the beyond. It cast a few russet beams before dying completely. The plain became a silver blue.

Meanwhile a sharp wind rose from the Northwest. It was working along very low, like a workman stooping to level the snow, making a rasping noise as it swept across the surface of the ground. It swept along in delicate scrolls, spangled with phosphorescence, lingering in a hollow, leaping a bank, then lingering in another hollow, until it reached the travelers, whose faces it lashed cruelly. But Lavallée had already passed Saint Norbert, which was a dangerous place to cross. He had taken a trail that wound through a wood where the snow was cut into deep trails by hares which had gnawed the bark of the young poplars. Sheltered from the wind, now, the sled flew, scarcely disturbing the snow as it passed. To the East dogs were barking.

Then, suddenly, the travelers descended a steep hill. Smith, always ready for everything, clung on tightly. Carruthers, now asleep, was thrown violently into the snow. He got up unhurt, but powdered with snow, and cursing frightfully. They crossed the Assiniboine and ascended the other bank which was even steeper. A mile or two through the woods. . . . Then a huge mass honey-combed with light. . . . It was Fort Garry.

A half-breed stopped them. Lavallée began to make himself known. . . . "Hey! there, old pal! So it's you, Pierre Ouellette? It's me, Lavallée, you know, Lavallée. . . . Your cousin, Pierre Lavallée."

"Well! well! I might not have recognized you. . . . It's been years since we saw each other."

While Lavallée was talking, playing to perfection the rôle which had been assigned to him, the two cronies, Smith and Carruthers (the latter still sleepy) slipped as quietly as possible into the assembly room. A few vigorous nudgings from the chief commissioner kept the secretary from collapsing to the floor asleep. He followed the irresistible impetus given him by Smith's left hand.

In the vast room there was so much tobacco

smoke that in the midst of the blue, acrid cloud Smith, at first, could distinguish only a vague swarm of voices and heads. A second later he heard an uproar of voices, babbling in all the languages of the prairie. Then he began to discern several faces, that, for example, of Antoine Morin, which was pentagonal. His face was flat, the color of smoked salmon, and divided obliquely by two penny-bank slits. (Convenient to put his savings in, thought the chief commissioner. Those slits, everything considered, aren't so convenient as they might be because of their V shape, which would necessitate a special kind of money. . . . Hum. . . . They're his eyes.) Two wisps of gray hair, irregular and faun-like, completed the description of Big Bear. . . . Then to Smith's great joy he recognized Lépine, for he knew Lépine was the most active of Riel's lieutenants. He leisurely examined his profile, all nose and chin, both of which were hooked, and evidently trying to touch each other. Then Smith asked himself if, in the round and laughing face of Charlie Gosselin, exactly like a Holland cheese, he would have any chance of encountering the rat in the fable.

A gigantic teapot was purring on the stove. The men were wandering to and fro, a bacon sand-

wich in one hand and a tin cup in the other to get the black, hot liquid with which they washed down their frugal repast. Smith decided to mingle with the mob. Reminding Carruthers that they had not eaten, he dragged him along with him. Carruthers had been somewhat awakened by the smell of food. The poor secretary was inwardly storming against the indifference of his chief to good, square meals served three times a day at fixed hours.

Confident of their sentinels, and moreover totally indifferent for the moment to everything which was not food and drink, the half-breeds paid no attention to these two men clad in furs, who strolled tranquilly among the groups.

The chief commissioner climbed the steps of the dark stairway to look for MacTavish. He bumped against a man who swore in French and asked sternly:

“What the hell are you doing here?”

“Could you tell me where to find MacTavish’s room?” asked Smith in too perfect French.

The accent, almost that of the mother-country, so different from the half-breed accent, and the use of the formal “vous” alone was enough to betray him. . . . The voice answered with great authority:

"Oh, what's this? . . . Englishmen. . . . Mac-Tavish? . . . Come with me, please. . . ."

The "please" had for Smith the value of an official order. He did not attempt to dispute it, but followed docilely, devising some scheme. But none seemed simple enough and consequently impractical. Before he had time to choose between the schemes which came to him, he found himself in a small room, badly lighted by a smoking oil lamp. A person unknown to him turned around, and Smith saw a giant with intelligent eyes and an energetic but gentle face. (I must take advantage of his gentleness, thought Smith.) The man wore an embroidered jacket of moose-skin, its fringes dangling over his muscular shoulders and arms.

Smith had an inspiration.

"You are Mr. Riel, aren't you? I'm delighted to meet you."

He extended his hand, which Riel took automatically. Meanwhile the half-breed had recovered his self-possession.

"Yes, I am Riel. But you, who are you?"

"Oh! not an enemy," said Smith, laughing pleasantly.

While talking he admired the chief's fine

stature, and the latter was flattered. The chief commissioner continued:

"I'm Smith. Donald A. Smith is my name. I'm one of the directors of the Company and I came to see our agent, Mr. MacTavish, to settle our accounts, which are in arrears."

"I know your name. But how in the devil did you get through?"

"Well," said Smith, laughing, "I don't know myself . . . the most natural way in the world, I suppose. . . . We peaceful people don't inspire fear in anyone."

Riel frowned. But that was Janvier Ritchot's business, and not the Englishman's. He continued his questioning.

"What's the news from Ontario?"

Smith glanced at him slyly.

"They say that the Canadian Confederation was proclaimed last month."

Riel leaped to his feet so suddenly that the floor shook. The various objects on top of the bookcases and tables rattled. Smith seized Carruthers, who, standing up asleep against the door, almost fell on the floor.

"The Confederation, the Confederation," shouted the half-breed vehemently. "Are we cattle,

Mr. Smith? Have they any right to sell us like that? . . . And your damn Company, too. . . . Who made it a success? Didn't we, we and our fathers? And you sell us, we who are a peaceful people, the sons of the men who won this country from the Indians, and who thus permitted your Company to flourish and to get rich. . . . Mr. Smith! . . . and now you . . .

"Not us!" cut in Smith dryly.

"I beg your pardon! Don't interrupt me! . . . You dispose of us without even deigning to consult us. . . . They sent a governor, a governor illegally named! since he started on his way three months ago, and the Confederation didn't exist then. . . . This MacDougall. . . . Have you seen him?" he asked abruptly.

Smith evaded the question.

"Mr. MacDougall is no longer the governor. He has been removed from office. Didn't you know it?"

"Huh! what's the difference! After him, someone else will be sent."

Smith was feeling his ground.

"There's some talk about a chief commissioner, with full power to arrange things for the best interests of everyone. . . ."

"To the devil with your commissioner. . . .

We'll never let him come here. Ah! what happened to you will never happen again. . . . Oh! I'll attend to that. . . ."

"Very well," said Smith imperturbably. "Will you let me see MacTavish now?"

"Hell, yes, if you want to."

"Thank you, that's all I want."

Riel descended the stairs four steps at a time, elbowing through the groups. His evident wrath stilled the most animated conversation.

"Who's on guard?" he asked in a voice that presaged no good.

There was silence. But Riel having repeated his question with an oath, someone decided to answer:

"Pete Ouellette."

Riel went out.

"Ah! poor old Pete," someone said. "He's sure in for it. It looks bad for him when Louis Riel gets all 'het' up like that."

Pierre Ouellette, still talking with Lavallée, had been joined by Johnny Grant and Hardisty, who, after plying the prairie sentinels with drink until they were completely gone, had come to the Fort to get the news of Smith.

They were saying:

"And my cousin Flora, how is she getting along? Ah! yes, and our uncle Hermidas? They put him under ground this Fall, hey?"

At this moment Riel descended on them like a raging lion. There was no longer any question of relatives, dead or alive, poor or rich.

"Ah! you bloody son-of-a-bitch. So that's how you attend to your job! Huh! you're a pretty bastard to let strangers in. . . . And Britishers at that. . . ."

Beside himself with wrath, he struck Ouellette in the face. The half-breed staggered under Riel's blow, half of his face becoming black and the other half livid. He opened one side of his mouth to stammer:

"Yes, I done wrong, I done wrong!"

"All right," cried Riel. "I gave you what was coming to you. We won't say anything more about it. It's all over now, you did wrong, you've been punished. It's forgiven, you'll become a real guy again. . . . But you, Pierre Lavallée, you bloody pest, you dirty skunk! How much money did you get to sell us out like this? Ah! you let Britishers in, and at a time when your brothers are at war with them."

Lavallée resisted.

"Oh! Oh! Louis Riel. . . . Why should I answer to you? You're not my boss. . . . I'm not sworn to you, nor to anyone else. Did I ever ask you for a bloody penny? Is it you who helps me to live? There's those who say that politics makes good-for-nothings. Me, I work. I work for Smith, and you've got nothing to do with me. It's none of your business."

"You think so, hey, my little Jesus?" said Riel, who spoke perfectly the half-breed jargon. "And you think that I, Louis Riel, came back from the states for nothing? No, I came back to set you free, you half-breeds who are my people and yours too, though you don't seem to know it. Do you hear, you dirty bastard?"

"Me, a bastard! . . ."

Enraged, Lavallée pulled out his pistol. But the shot went into the air. Coming to a prompt decision, Johnny Grant, thick-set, round and big-bellied like a barrel, but agile withal, had twisted his arm and flung him to the ground. He then sat down on Lavallée, who remained immobile, except for his legs which kicked about in the air, as high as Grant's shoulders. The latter held Lavallée down by his weight, gripping his two fists in one of his enormous paws, saying:

"Don't be an idiot. . . . Killing a Christian isn't a nice thing to do!"

Then addressing Riel he said:

"You know very well that I'm only a half-breed Englishman and not too much on your side. Something I don't know much about is whether you're the man we need or not. I don't care a damn," he added in English, "I saved your life, Louis, and I guess you owe me that much."

"A hell of a lot I care whether I'm living or not," cried Riel angrily.

Immediately he was ashamed of his ingratitude. His voice softened and he continued, giving his hand to Grant:

"You're right, Johnny. I owe you my life, and I'm not the man to forget it."

"That's all right," said Johnny soberly. "Consider the two Englishmen as our friends and we're quits."

"Aren't you afraid I'll eat them?" asked Riel.
"In any case, I won't harm them."

Terribly agitated, gesticulating with his long, thin arms, Lépine came running up.

"Riel!" he cried. "Riel! where are you?"

"Here I am. Leave me alone so I can talk with Johnny Grant."

"To hell with Johnny, you can gas with him another time," replied the lieutenant with impatience. "There's lots of other things going on up there. Come here, I want to tell you. Come on. . . . Hurry up."

Taking Riel by the arm, he led him away. Running along the snow-covered court-yard, then through the large crowded room where the men gave way to them; fleeing as if they were being chased by a pitch-fork, they finally reached the stairway. The half-breed chief asked for an explanation, but he obtained only confused replies, mingled with the names of MacTavish, Cowan and Smith which hummed in his ears, without his being able to understand quite clearly what it was all about.

He found himself in MacTavish's room, in the presence of three men whose names were dancing their incoherent jig on Lépine's lips. Smith was seated on a chair, his feet on a table covered with papers, resting his right elbow in his left hand. MacTavish was standing behind him, stroking his long white whiskers. Cowan, his Scotch-Jewish face completely framed by wavy hair, was laughing with a particularly satisfied air, which made Riel want to cuff him. On MacTavish's bed, a

human form was snoring and muttering. It was Carruthers, now fast asleep, having a wild nightmare.

When Riel entered, Smith removed his feet from the table. He was wearing large felt carpet-slippers, worn down at the heels. He stood up and extended his hand to the half-breed.

"Mr. Riel, won't you sit down, please. The gentleman with you is Mr. Lépine I believe. . . ."

"Yes, my first lieutenant."

"Delighted to know you. . . . He's all right here, I presume." Smith turned toward his companions. "It will be all right if he stays, won't it?" They acquiesced by a nod of the head. "Mr. Lépine, I am charmed to meet you . . . but I have no seat to offer you. . . . Mr. Riel, you are, so I'm told"—he glanced out of the corner of his eye to see what effect his words were producing—"head of the Provisional Government." These two words were pronounced with emphasis. "We must therefore collaborate." Riel gave a start. "Look over these papers which invest me with certain powers . . . certain powers . . ." He built up his effect by searching for words. . . . Riel watched him attentively. "With certain powers which in no way annul the title you hold with the

nation's assent. . . . I am the Chief Commissioner of the Canadian Government."

And he shoved a large parchment adorned with a gigantic seal in the shape of a red star toward the half-breed.

"The Chief Commissioner!" cried Riel, amazed, regarding the document. "The Chief Commissioner!"

Astonishment was replaced by rage. He bellowed so loudly that Carruthers almost woke up.

"We recognize neither Chief Commissioners nor a Canadian Government. And first of all, Mr. Smith, or whatever your name might be, you have . . . you have"—his voice choked with wrath, and he brought his hand to his throat as if to squeeze out the most acid words, as juice is squeezed from a lemon—"you have lied to me."

"Lied!" yelled Smith, reddening.

But the Chief Commissioner calmed himself by a violent effort, and continued quietly.

"Let's not become excited, Mr. Riel. What have I lied to you about?"

"You at least kept your real identity from me. . . . You said you were an agent of the Company."

"Certainly, I am an agent of the Company, and

one of the most important. I am one of the directors, and I shall profit by this occasion, Mr. Riel, to assure you that *our* Company will not pick a quarrel with you for certain irregularities, or for certain requisitions . . . of which we admit the legitimacy, and which will be, if you wish, our contribution to your . . . to your fine national movement."

"Are you laughing at me?" snarled Riel. "Those are very pretty words. They might hide something very ugly."

With his usual inability to understand anything subtle, MacTavish thought it well to intervene.

"Ah! Mr. Riel," said he, stroking his whiskers, "I knew your father very well, he was a . . ."

"Yes," interrupted the half-breed, "you've already told me that a thousand times. . . . Every one of your lies starts like that. . . You can't take me in by that any longer!"

"Mr. Riel, let's not get away from the question at hand," resumed Smith quietly. "Permit me to state it again."

"I . . . I . . ."

"But let me speak in *my turn*. You'll see that we'll be able to arrive at an understanding. Now,

this is what you want. You want to be consulted about the compensations to be accorded to the half-breeds by the British Crown. That's a fair request. You want your language and your religion to be respected. That's also a fair request, and Mgr. Taché, who is by birth a Frenchman, and who is your religious leader, will take care of that. You want your provisional government recognized. I'm with you on that. We agree, don't we, and now you see how simple it was."

Mechanically, Riel murmured: "Yes."

Smith concealed his joy. However, it was none the less real because of that. He had known how to evade the dangerous question from the very beginning: the adoption of the Constitution of Manitoba and the Canadian Confederation without the approbation of the principals concerned. For him it was extremely important, because his entire railway system rested, financially, upon it. He flattered himself that, having succeeded in satisfying the half-breeds to some extent, he would impose his schemes upon them when the time came. He immediately began to follow up his advantages.

"You half-breed Frenchmen form about one-half of the population, don't you, Mr. Riel?"

"About," said Riel.

"Oh yes! Mr. Riel, I want to tell you how delighted I was to read the clever appeal you made to your English brothers. You have won the right to be leader of this temporary government, and you can count on my aid to get the English half-breeds' votes for you. In the assembly you will allot them a number of representatives equal to your own, and everything will be fine. . . . I'm your man, Mr. Riel."

Suddenly lowering his voice, he shot the arrow he had been keeping for Riel until the last, the one with the sharpest point. . . .

"Mr. Riel, I have some good news about one of your friends. Mr. O'Donoghue is returning. He wasn't able to get along with his Irish brothers."

He failed to say that he, Smith, with the aid of a great many promises and money, had held the cards of British diplomacy. He saw Riel turn pale. He extended his hand to him with a sympathy that was not feigned this time, and which went straight to the half-breed's heart.

"Mr. Riel, don't be distressed about it. You don't realize all the trouble you are saving yourself in the future. You can absolutely count on me to make this country a great one. It's a beautiful dark region, and it needs only a little light."

Please give the necessary orders so that I won't be hindered in any action which will be for your own good."

His joy at having won the first battle kept Smith from taking a rest however. He rejoiced at having played the game so cleverly. After his terrible trip he felt no weariness, but only a violent desire to breathe deeply the air of the new province which he was going to give to his Empire.

He went down to the court-yard. His lungs expanded. He soared along on his lyricism. He translated all his emotions into rich and magnificent images. The day had been formed of pearls set in silver and bronze. Now the night was an ever-changing gem, the snow of amethysts, the sky cut into an immense sapphire. He stretched out his hands to let the gold of the stars fall into them. . . . But that was the present. . . . He contrived to imagine the future, following the same decoration of jewelry. . . . A spring of turquoise and aquamarine . . . a summer of lapis-lazuli and emeralds . . . an autumn of rubies, of topazes and opals, set in the purest gold. . . . Then he burst out laughing, for he professed the most profound contempt for bad poets. He felt great things

palpitating within him, and he wondered how much eloquence would be lost before he succeeded in convincing the financial circles to extend, across rivers, forests, lakes, prairies, swamps and mountains, rail after rail, the immense serpent of the Canadian Pacific, which, one day, according to Smith's estimation, would make the hard, russet wheat of the vast Empire pour into ships destined for Europe, and fill the coffers of the English financiers with gold, sweated drop by drop, from the relentless labor of thousands and thousands of emigrants.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RIEL called a meeting. Little sleighs, their floors strewn with hay, and drawn by horses bedecked with sleigh-bells, brought the spirited, boisterous crowd of English half-breeds to Fort Garry. They came along snow-covered trails, glazed by the squeaky runners of the sleds. Proud of their shining harness, of the red, green or black paint of their sleighs, and of their superior origin, the English half-breeds eyed their half-brothers haughtily. For them, the French half-breeds descended from two vanquished races. Moreover, during the past few days, and particularly on the occasion of the New Year (1870), Smith, looking thin and wiry, had stopped before every door in Selkirk, Headingley and Kildonan. He was attended by Carruthers, who was gloomy and completely useless, unless as a ballast for the sleigh (in going over the bumps), and by Johnny Grant, who carried, with cautious respect, an earthen jug, continually replenished with strong, bitter whiskey, which was used to start the conversation. When

those concerned, through numerous arguments, had been able to form a favorable opinion of the alcohol, Smith started to talk.

He spoke first of conciliation; then about the great projects of the Canadian government, and of the future prosperity of the country. At this point Smith called the children and gave them some small change, well knowing that as soon as he had turned his back, the money would pass—not without whining and tears—from the hands of the dirty children into the pockets of their parents. Then insidiously, by circuitous ways, he induced the English half-breeds to talk about the contempt (real or imaginary), the Whites bore them. Here the Chief Commissioner's craftiness came into play. Lowering his voice, he approached his interlocutor whose breath now reeked with tobacco and whiskey. He would then whisper the following insinuation: the truth is that it's not the Indian, but the French blood that makes the half-breed a savage. Then using the gossip supplied him by Johnny Grant and Pierre Lavallée, he proved his assertion by convincing examples. After which he was careful to finish the job of filling the men with whiskey. Certain, then, of having achieved his purpose, he would go to the next

house there to try the same little game, which he always won.

Meanwhile, at Fort Garry, Lépine and Goulet had become aware of this contempt. They talked about it loudly, bitterly, and Smith, who went from group to group, for a short time feared violence. But MacDermott, Grant, and Norquay were cautious politicians. Knowing that the humble will be exalted they succeeded in re-establishing a certain cordiality, entirely unreal perhaps, but sufficient to avoid a catastrophe.

Hamarstyne, placid and good-humored, was everywhere at once. He was very agreeable. His wife now gave him more proofs of affection than ever, and he felt a sincere fondness for Riel.

But with the very first speech, the meeting became a surge of heads, rising and falling, in a tempest of yells and hoots. For a moment it was feared that Riel would come to blows with MacDermott. The latter, from the platform, was insisting on being made chairman, because, he said, "he was capable of talking longer than Riel and could bring forth a sufficient number of arguments to put anyone to sleep for two hours." Smith was the only one who understood what an unconscious

but definite satire against the democratic régime taken as a whole, was contained in MacDermott's boast. Riel replied with similar remarks which raised MacDermott's anger to white heat. A fight seemed imminent. Encouraging words flew about concerning the champions of the two camps. For an instant it seemed likely that the head of the government would prove himself the better boxer of the two. But Hamarstyne saved the situation. He thrust his thick body between Riel and MacDermott. He took their right hands, uniting them in his own. Hand in hand, MacDermott and Riel continued to cover each other with insults, based on genealogical data. But the crowd, deceived by the gesture, broke into sudden applause. Various voices demanded that Riel and MacDermott take the oath of peace. Hamarstyne, with a comically serious look, seized them by the neck, half strangling them, and drew their two angry faces toward each other. The two men wanted to bite, but awakening to the humorous side of the situation, they could not keep from laughing, which almost reconciled them. Riel said in an undertone:

“What cattle!”

MacDermott nodded his approval, and at once stretched his hand toward his adversary who took

it in his. In one glance the two men exchanged their feeling of despair before human stupidity.

To get down to work, Hamarstyne, who played the difficult role of an absolutely neutral arbiter, asked, with the support of Riel and MacDermott, that twenty French and as many English representatives be named immediately. The cheering was so great that the walls seemed to shake. The names called out at random were approved by raised hands. But the pandemonium prevented any voices from being heard, and it became necessary to adjourn immediately until the following day. For the assemblage insisted that first of all it must drink to the health of the newly chosen representatives.

Riel, heavy at heart, had to conceal his feelings and hurry about to arrange for the day's patrol, knowing well that, two hours later, the whole drunken colony would be divided into two new parties, neither, however, being in the least hostile to the other. One party would be the dead-drunks, who would lie in a stupor in the barns and stables, or even in the snow, and the other the living-drunks, who would dance jigs to the sound of screeching violins, or pinch the legs of frenzied women in the darkness.

Riel was quite aware that Smith was taking him in, "doing" him, as he called it. But Smith was an almost imperceptible adversary. He was a very small man, thin and delicate, who talked with exquisite politeness in a low, irresistible insinuating voice, always ready to oblige even those who showed him the greatest animosity, willingly giving them good advice, perfectly capable of doctoring a sick cow, or pulling from his pocket a quinine tablet for a high fever, and, above all, possessing an unlimited reserve of whiskey and small change.

For example, Schultz mysteriously escaped from prison, and it was impossible to prove that Smith had anything to do in the affair. On the contrary, he spontaneously offered his services, and appeared to be sincerely hurt when Riel declined them. When Pat O'Donoghue returned, furious at having failed to arrange a pact with the leaders of the American Sinn-Feiners, he never suspected (in view of Smith's repeated offers to arrange a second trip for him) that the chief commissioner had passed that way,—before him too—and that he had left a part of his regular guard there, the *Saint George Cavalry*. Moreover, Smith left, saying he was "extremely pleased to see that peace

reigned." Here, he smiled, and shook Riel's hand effusively. He announced that he would let Ottawa know of Mr. Riel's excellent management and of his great ability as an organizer. That as soon as Mgr. Taché returned from Rome he would be invested with all the necessary power. In his own mind, however, Smith could not but award himself a magnificent degree in advanced diplomacy, for he had spread discord and left the archbishop with a situation that forced him to capitulate, and thus lose his influence among the half-breeds. As for himself, Smith considered himself very flattered to have met Mr. Riel, to have had the great honor of collaborating with him and to have learned lessons from him that he would never forget.

Although the flattery to some extent lulled Riel's rancor, he felt that Smith was going a bit too strong. It was with difficulty that he kept from striking him. He regretted it was impossible to quietly dispose of Smith, since there were powerful people who were awaiting his return. And as for striking the man, what pretext could be found when he was so polite? However Riel stared at Smith, trying to put at least into his glance all the hatred that had been forgotten a minute be-

fore. But the little man eyed him so frankly and naïvely that he succeeded in disarming all suspicion. After all, Smith was perhaps a busybody who had stuck a clumsy finger in every pie. Riel clung to this idea, thus quenching the last remaining spark of his conviction. Well! since he manifested a desire to leave, it was better to facilitate his departure, and get rid of him as quickly as possible. And he went himself to choose the two best horses and the most comfortable sleigh for Smith.

Two hours later, on the road to Pembina, Smith said to Carruthers:

"I assure you, Carruthers, that this man Riel isn't stupid at bottom. But one doesn't become a diplomat all of a sudden. The strength of us Englishmen lies in continuing a tradition. Even our originality, when we have any, derives much of its support from our certainty of established facts. Don't regard Riel with contempt, Carruthers. He needs only a good master. Such as he is, in spite of his stature, I can slip him in my pocket very neatly. A damn beautiful country for the Empire. Faster, Lavallée! I want to sleep in Pembina tonight."

And his soul rejoiced, for he knew that he had just rendered the Empire an inestimable service.

The eighth of February Riel learned something which Smith could have told him more than fifteen days before, i.e., that Schultz and Dennis had organised at Portage-la-Prairie a band of five hundred men, the command of which had been confided to a young feather-brain, Boulton, whom they had promoted to the grade of major, *in the name of the Queen*.

Young Bruce, a half-breed Scotchman, but engaged to a girl from Brazeau, brought him this news.

The messenger took a good swig of whiskey, spat and wiped his mouth on the back of his sleeve. Then he told how they had threatened to enlist him, but that he had, naturally, refused. He gave Riel the names of a number of Boulton's soldiers. Riel made him repeat twice the name of Scott, and the second time, he struck the table violently with his fist.

"That damned *boticē!* Be generous to those swine! . . . He swore he would never bear arms against us again. Scott, you say? A big blond fellow! Billy Scott? . . ."

"Yes, yes, the same, I believe," replied Bruce. "I heard him say he had been your prisoner."

"Oh! if I get hold of that man again . . ."

Riel did not finish his sentence, but a grin twisted his mouth. Bruce understood, and shrugged his shoulders with indifference, before asking again for another "swig" from the bottle. He drank it in one gulp, and his words then became as fluid as the liquor. The men were to march upon Headingley and Fort Garry, then from there to Winnipeg. The plan was extremely simple, but due to his garrulity he succeeded in confusing it, and made it seem complex to Riel.

The chief lost no time in making his arrangements. He left Fort Garry with Pat O'Donoghue in charge. For some time the Orangeists had displayed a desire to hang this red-head, and the prospect of such a fate made the Irishman one of the most solid supporters that Riel could have found.

Since his defeat, Pat O'Cork, as he was commonly called, had felt a growing hatred for everything that was English. He fanned the flames with a good deal of bad alcohol. He drank in large quantities, but never permitted his drunkenness to overcome his lucidity, however. And between

drinks he would bellow the first four verses of a song learned in heaven knows what suburb of Cork.

“Here’s to the lass of the Lily White Label.”

For the second verse he dropped his voice three notes.

“The curves of her thighs are as round as an apple.”

Then, in a high falsetto he would sing the last two verses, which were frankly obscene, presenting a picturesque description of the secret charms and habits of the lady. He took delight in singing the most unexpected variations. Then perhaps some wild young fellow, admirer of the stanza, would show a desire to learn it, and sing it with him, not in unison, that being impossible, but with sufficient noise to satisfy the fiery-haired fanatic.

Profiting by his numerical superiority, Riel sent Lépine with a strong detachment to defend the entrances to Headingley. He himself withdrew to Saint Boniface, where, in case of a set-back, he would be protected on the west by the Red River, and on the south by the Senne. Though both were frozen, they constituted, because of their steep banks, trenches that would be difficult to cross in

the face of the half-breed sharpshooters. In spite of the cold of thirty to forty degrees below zero, he kept the scouts on the go all the time.

On the evening of February 17th, Lépine himself came to announce the victory. The half-breed scouts had run into Boulton's troops who were advancing across the snow-covered expanses in a rash disorder. Immediately the people of Portage-la-Prairie were divided into two troops. The first, more numerous group, seeing that matters were really serious, had returned to Portage to warm up and stuff themselves with bacon and fish from Lake Manitoba. The second, composed of only forty-eight men, had followed the mounted sentry, who withdrew without firing, in accordance with Lépine's orders. The English had done a little harmless firing, in spite of which they found themselves surrounded by the greater part of Lépine's troops, who had come running at the sound of firing. The Orangeists surrendered immediately. Only one had attempted to resist. A fellow named Scott—Riel started—had killed one of the Ouellette boys and wounded two other men before he could be caught. Lépine told the whole story with an abundance of descriptive gestures, interrupt-

ing it with the guttural, excited laughter of a real Indian.

Riel immediately had forty-six prisoners freed, detaining only their chief, the pseudo-major Boulton, and Scott, the perjurer and murderer of young Ouellette.

The father, brothers and uncles of the victim came to demand vengeance. They were a surly lot. Their faces were twisted with hatred and grief. Their hands shook, as, in husky, trembling voices, they demanded that Scott be condemned. Spasmodic weeping interrupted their demands. They repeatedly uttered praises of their boy. Finally a violent wail rent the air, and old Mother Ouellette, draped in a green and red shawl, stooped with pain, and weak from crying, her brown fingers opening and closing convulsively, tottered through the semicircle of "her men," and threw herself at Riel's feet. She started a sentence in Cree which ended in sobs. Finally, after crossing herself she went on her way, a wretched, gaudy wreck, supported by her two sons who mingled their blasphemies with her prayers.

Riel decided to call a court martial. It was composed of four members: Riel, Elzéar, Goulet and

Lépine. A jury of twelve was named by drawing lots, and the proceeding commenced at once. Following the custom of the prairie, the father of the victim was the accuser.

Major Boulton and Scott appeared at the bar. Riel asked questions concerning their identity which both answered. Then the half-breed asked if anyone was appearing against Boulton. His eyes wandered around the assembly which formed a semicircle. Old Patrick Gagnon, head juryman, was blandly warming his feet at the stove and the snow melting on his embroidered moccasins covered them with large black spots. Old Ouellette's puffy eyes were running, and his jaw was chattering. Slobber oozed from between his lips, oiling the two little points of his curly gray whiskers. Obtaining no response, Riel repeated the question, looking at him with a significant air. But the old man passed his forearm over his eyes and made a negative sign. Then he concentrated his attention on Scott. The wicked gleam of his two little black eyes suddenly became dry from the heat of his hatred, and something entered his throat which made his Adam's apple rise and fall, like the gullet of a maddened turkey. Riel repeated his question a third time, and after a mo-

ment of silence, he consulted his assistant judge. Then he announced:

"Thomas Boulton, in the absence of accusation against you, the court orders that you be set at immediate liberty."

Boulton stood up.

He was very pale, much paler than before the verdict. In an unsteady voice, he said:

"I . . . I . . . I . . . thank you. . . ." Then he added in a firmer voice: "May I stay here to assist William Scott in the capacity of defender?"

Riel glanced questioningly at Lépine and Goulet, who nodded in the affirmative.

"You may," he said.

And he immediately asked if anyone accused Scott of having committed a crime.

It was the moment old Ouellette had awaited. He straightened up as if he had been kicked, and started a long polyglot discourse in Cree, Chipeway and French. He spoke very quickly, constantly changing the dialect, and Riel had trouble in following him, for the old fellow mixed his accusations with matters that were entirely foreign to the Ouellette versus Scott affair. He recalled his son's childhood, and said that he had been a good

cattle herder. He mentioned a cow that was difficult to milk, an obstinate horse that his "dead boy" alone could manage. And he would have forgotten to speak of his son's murder if Riel had not brought him back to the subject. Upon which, Boulton started a discussion with Riel which threatened to turn out badly, for the English major stupidly mentioned the inability of the "savages" to observe the forms of justice. Goulet saved the situation by speaking with much authority and composure, and by threatening to clear the room.

But old Ouellette finally managed to extract from his jaw, as well as from the old stumps of his teeth, the shapeless debris of his accusation. Then the witnesses were called. They were numerous. Contrary to all custom, the testimony was brief and to the point. As soon as the evidence against Scott was piled up, it seemed to crush the entire room with its tremendous weight. All the faces became pale, the breathing noiseless, and at moments a nervous tremor showed that their strength was at an end.

At last Riel put the final question to the accused, asking him if he recalled having sworn never again to carry arms against the half-breeds. Scott

flushed, but kept silence, of which the court took note.

Boulton, in his turn, rose. He had regained some of his composure, and spoke in an almost steady voice. He agreed as to the accuracy of the facts, but pleaded the state of war, and made an appeal to the jury's clemency. They listened to him in a silence more tragic than words, and as soon as he had finished speaking, and Scott, with a shake of the head, had indicated that he had nothing to add, the jury retired to deliberate.

Ten minutes later the news of Scott's condemnation flew over Winnipeg like a stormy wind, leaving the inhabitants with bowed heads and quivering hearts. The execution was fixed for the following morning at nine o'clock.

All night, petitioners besieged Fort Garry where Riel kept himself locked up and inaccessible. At his window there flickered the pale light of an oil-lamp, and his shadow could be seen passing and repassing against the curtain.

At seven o'clock in the morning, his eyes swollen from loss of sleep, he called Lépine to give him his orders. The half-breeds then met together in the assembly room, after which Riel arrived.

They immediately attempted to approach him to wrest a pardon for the condemned man from him. But Lépine and Ritchot kept a strict watch and drove the intruders away. Riel took off his fur cap, and with his hair in disorder, he placed into his cap a great number of small papers carefully folded in squares, each of which bore a man's name. With a weary gesture, he called Hunt Morin and made a sign for him to draw. It was a tragic lottery. The names began to come. . . . Janvier Ritchot . . . André Naud . . . Lépine. . . . And those whom fate had just designated grew pale and sick, while their neighbors drew aside as if their misfortune were contagious.

When the names of the twelve men who were to comprise the firing squad had been announced, those whom fate had spared, one after another, sighed with relief.

In a voice so strange that he was shocked by it,—was it really he who was speaking?—Riel announced that he had a stack of twelve rifles (as he displayed them they shone cruelly in the half-shadows), of which *only one* was loaded. Thus no one would ever know the name of him who had accomplished “God's designs.”

Then leaving Goulet to take care of the last

preparations for the atrocious deed, he hurriedly went up to his room.

The frost-covered window-pane could not cool his burning forehead. He felt that he was suffocating, and raised his hand to his throat.

The door opened and he turned quickly around. . . . Ah! . . . *It was not Scott's ghost!* Nevertheless he let out a stifled cry, a shiver ran down his spine. . . . A pair of arms was clasped nervously about him, nervous fingers clawed at his clothing, a burning mouth drank from his lips, already dry. . . . Mrs. Hamarstyne wore a pink woolen cap from which wild strands of blond curls escaped. Her eyes were clouded, drowned in tears . . . and desire.

She murmured:

"O Riel . . . Riel . . . O Riel. . . . I came . . . Scott . . . Scott. . . . My God . . . would you have him die?"

Caressingly, she took his head in her hands, and looking into his eyes, she waited for his reply.

It was long in coming. With a mixture of tenderness, of coquetry and reproaches, this beautiful woman closed and opened her eyes, then she

crushed her heaving breasts against Riel's chest.

. . . It was a long, lingering kiss.

"Oh!" she murmured feebly. "Still, I had sworn . . . my eternity. Take it, Riel . . . my soul, take it, but save Scott."

"Yes . . . yes. . . ."

It was murmured very low, like the most beautiful avowal of love.

"But leave me so that I can give the orders. . . . There is scarcely a half-hour left."

"A half-hour. . . . My God! Go quickly. . . . Oh! Riel . . . Riel. . . . I love you . . . I love you. . . . Half an hour left? . . . Oh! I can't stand it any longer. . . . Kiss me . . . yes . . . like that . . . half an hour . . . there's still time Oh! . . . Oh! . . . Oh! . . . Riel . . . Take me . . . take me right now."

A brief order re-echoed through the courtyard. Riel tore himself away from the arms he loved too well. Then he hurriedly opened the window and shouted the order for a reprieve. In his rage he tore off the shutter. He opened his mouth. The detonation had already started rolling like thunder. Streaks of flame striped the snow . . . a gray smoke issued from the guns into the

fog. . . . There was a dark motionless form on the ground.

Riel and Mrs. Hamarstyne looked at each other. Both of them were horribly pale, almost disfigured . . . suddenly grown old. . . . For they knew now that they would mutually hate each other forever, and that even to pronounce the name of one would be incurable pain to the other.

At one bound, the chief went down the stairs and into the courtyard. Breathlessly he questioned Elzéar Goulet who was leaning over Scott.

"Tell me?"

"He's breathing," replied Goulet. "Thank God." Goulet wiped the perspiration from his forehead before continuing:

"We might be able to save him."

Riel with a look of gratitude to Goulet, leaned down and picked up Scott in his arms. He did it almost tenderly. The wounded man's heart was still beating, and the little black hole, from which the blood seeped, was perhaps not mortal.

Slowly Riel carried him up the stairs. He was going toward his room, but a thought held him back. . . . That room, he never wanted to see again, never again. . . . He chose another room at random, Pat O'Donoghue's.

Upon Riel's entrance, the Irishman tried awkwardly to hide a bottle. Pat looked with stupefaction as the half-breed government chief laid this man who was an enemy, and still breathing, on his bed. What right had Scott to cheat death? Pat was still more visibly surprised when Riel asked him curtly for the bottle of whiskey. After undressing Scott, he began washing the wound with alcohol. The Irishman, however, offered his services, which were accepted. Scott was lying on the dirty, ill-smelling mattress.

"Pat O'Cork," said Riel, "you're going to take care of this man for me. There's not another cursed doctor in Winnipeg. We've sent a messenger to Portage-la-Prairie to ask Doctor Lynch to come. Watch over him until then. I'll send you a bottle of whiskey to keep you company."

He went out as soon as Pat had agreed. He felt greatly relieved. However, remorse still rankled in his heart like a wound. And he wondered what depths of hell Mrs. Hamarstyne dreamed about. . . . A dream? . . . No, nightmare, was the word he must employ.

He tried to distract himself by assuming additional work. The mail brought him the news that

Mgr. Taché would soon arrive, invested with full powers. The clergy had naturally obtained entire satisfaction concerning the question of Catholic schools subsidized by the government. The half-breeds had obtained one-eighth satisfaction: an illusory compensation in land. For Riel, as well as for Lépine, exile was hinted at. . . .

For the first time, he doubted the infallibility of the clergy. Rome had played the game with Protestant England at the expense of France. . . . Then, suddenly, he drew himself up, seized once more by an Indian atavism which exacted stoicism in defeat. And in a bold hand he wrote a report on the latest events, which he signed with his mark.

When he had finished, night had fallen. His first thought was for the wounded man and, wishing for news of him, he started for O'Donoghue's room.

An incoherent uproar emanated from this room, coming apparently from under the door and creeping along the floor of the obscure hallway. Pat, in a drunken voice, was singing his famous refrain, and was so tipsy that he kept on repeating the second verse:

"The curves of her thighs are as round as an apple . . ."

Then, furious at his bad memory, he would break into imprecations and curses. Riel quickened his step upon hearing him swear against "that damn, bloody Orangeman that he must look after."

Before the half-breed reached the door, there was a pistol-shot in the room, then a demoniacal laugh. . . . Icy sweat bathed Riel's back and armpits. . . . The voice rose again:

"The curves of her . . ."

Riel kicked the door open. In the smoke, Scott's body lay bleeding. Pat O'Cork turned his besotted eyes toward the chief, and said in a tragic voice:

"There's no more whiskey in the bottle!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

WITH a flourish of trumpets, motley colors floating in the wind and rising toward the sky, General Wolseley broke in the open door of Fort Garry.

To break in an open door is perhaps the only real victory, the only fruitful and economical one. A great politician and soldier, the general waited, before entering Manitoba, until Riel and Lépine, who had been banished, had both left quietly on horseback. Dashing through puddles of thawing ice, and over the prairie where the emerald-green of young sprouts was beginning to hide the earth, as if to patch up the used parts that the sun had gnawed, hole by hole, in the shroud of melting snow, they hastened south. Wolseley gave the two exiles all the time needed to reach Montana, where spring is more precocious, and where, under the shifting winds, the clouds were already clearing, and the undulations, blue upon blue, of the grassy hills and valleys had begun to surge.

At Winnipeg the metallic Red River was cut-

ting the banks of reddish clay like a knife blade. Following the shrill bagpipes and with their guns over their left shoulders, the Scotchmen with bare knees, pleated skirts, pouches of white goat and toques of eagles' feathers, were marching past. The shrill fifes and hoarse bugles accented the awkward, uneven step of the militiamen, who were stiff and constrained in their red skirts. Imper-
turbable, the peaceful conqueror took possession of the land in the name of the British Empire. And in the only street of Winnipeg a crowd, rap-
idly forgetful of Riel and Lépine, acclaimed the victors. . . .

The men in hunting jackets (now out of fashion); the old squaws with black, wrinkled faces, their pipes protruding from between stumps of teeth; the tittering girls, excited by the uniforms of the soldiers, and jealous of one another's bright pink or pale blue calico dresses; the dirty youngsters with their slant eyes opened wide: all welcomed the victors. . . .

Behind this official procession, after days and days of trouble, suffering, discouragement and unexpected bursts of energy, there appeared the im-
migrants, laden with provisions, in their muddy-

wheeled carts, whose axles had been mended at least twenty times. They were awkward, blundering and obstinate—quite determined to make this country theirs, even before the track promised by Donald A. Smith's publicity had extended its two voracious, parallel antennae.

The Orangeists, supported by the newcomers, began to raise their heads. They recounted their exploits and heaped Scott's curses upon Riel. Their first concern was to remove the greatest possible number of French names and to replace them by those commemorating the glory of William the Third of Orange, who, according to the sacred formula, *had delivered England from the pretenders and papists, and from warming-pans and wooden shoes*. Thus, for instance, the river called the *Islets de Bois* became the *Boyne*, perpetuating for the colonists' sons the souvenir of the defeat of the first of July, 1690, inflicted upon the Franco-Irish troops by King William himself.

Speculators, as for example "honest" John Haverland, a fanatic champion of Methodism, and his friends, were then,—through the grace of the Lord,—seized by an inspiration that was truly prophetic, and acquired for nothing (that is to say, according to the value at that time) lands

that had been given to the half-breeds. It was then that, on certain evenings, the fervent partisans of total abstinence could be seen discreetly hidden by blue fog, trotting from farm to farm, producing at the right moment the jug of whiskey which was to be the ruin of a family—little they cared about that!—but the making of their own fortune.

In 1873, Riel, who had been pardoned, returned to the country and was unanimously elected deputy of Provencher County. He again took up cudgels for the half-breeds, and protested against those who, playing upon their confidence and their ignorance, tricked them out of their rights. Toward the end of 1874 some of the political leaders, as a result of this, had Riel excluded from the assembly, for the sake of their safety. It is true that he was immediately re-elected, but as soon as he again started agitating the spoliation question, everyone who was worth buying was bought up. As a result, a veto of one hundred and twenty-four votes against sixty-eight annulled Riel's election. The third of September, 1874, he was unanimously re-elected for the third time. It was for this reason that the following month, on the fifteenth of Octo-

ber he was outlawed, sentenced to five years of exile, and denied all political rights.

His two hundred and forty acres of wheat, his cattle and his house were given as compensation to those voters who had hesitated up till the last, but had surrendered, like some valuable reserve, at the decisive moment.

On a horse as weary as its master, Riel, his shoulders bowed, left for Montana, where American friends had offered him work as a school-teacher. He accepted with indifference.

Sorrow, that patient sculptor, had chiseled its emblems of sadness upon his temples.

Although his appearance gave the impression that he would not bring much joy to a household, the girls looked at him with longing eyes, as, dressed in a rough suit, he wandered about in the country after school hours. It was known that he had held his own against England, a fact that increased his reputation in the United States. The details of his career were exaggerated even, and after his story had been whispered about, a glowing heroic halo could be seen about his head. Moreover, when they examined him more closely they noticed that he had big eyes, deep and

thoughtful. Finding him handsome, in spite of his taciturn, savage air, these dreamy girls liked to imagine the delight of resting their heads on his broad chest.

He, however, was disdainful of them. Indifferent to their offerings, he seemed to apply himself only to the task of teaching his class with gentleness and patience. Even the youngest made so bold as to smile at him when he turned toward them the melancholy expression of his soft glance. Then, when he felt that these little ones—offsprings of half-breeds or French Canadians immigrated to the United States—were in sympathy with him, he would open his sinewy hand wide and raise his palm to command silence. Taking a worn volume, he would read several pages of the history of France to them, “so that,” as he said, “they might always remember the country which had nourished their fathers.” And the youngsters admired without understanding, this far-off country, whose name brought a mist of tears into their teacher’s eyes.

Then came the hour of jealous passions. . . . Smith, now Sir Donald A. Smith (until he should become Lord Strathcona), had been able, by a

miracle of audacity and faith, to throw across Canada from one ocean to another, his famous Canadian Pacific Railway. Financially, the enterprise seemed ridiculous. Dollars had flown by millions and millions with each shovelful of earth. Great gangs of workmen had cut a road through the forest, bored through walls of stone, thrown bridges over rivers, built dikes in swamps, and, rail after rail, before the locomotive, the metal serpents had wound across the virgin country. A future important concession of land from the Canadian government was the only promise of remuneration for the expenditure involved, and then only when the country should be inhabited and each square foot multiplied a hundredfold in value. But Smith had been able to convince the immigration offices of the necessity of extensive publicity, and at the temporary stations, made of old railroad cars, isolated in a colorless immensity, the trains unloaded Icelanders with broad foreheads; tall, supple Norwegians; English, always famished; Scotchmen, miserly and active; bellicose and drunken Irishmen; stubborn, persevering Germans; and lastly, the Bretons with their archaic costumes (they shocked Riel's national pride) who were made fun of by the half-breeds because of

their uncleanliness and their noisy, unrestrained drunkenness.

The rhythm of the astonishing poem of Anglo-Saxon success rang in his ears like a personal insult. Ploughs turned up broad lanes in the silver and blue prairie. And in the Fall, fields of wheat waved in the wind, like a golden harvest of little nuggets extracted from some mysterious underground mine. Threshing machines, in a vermillion and amber dust, culled, winnowed and bagged the hard, firm grain. Smith was already complaining of the lack of freight cars to transport immediately toward the Atlantic ports the spoils torn from the conquered West. Towns sprang up under the sun almost between two showers. Mushroom towns, thought Riel, whose mycelium, carried by the wind across the prairie, created other towns—other towns quite as astonishing, as alive, and, said Riel with bitterness, as ridiculously vain.

During the spring evenings he loved to wander along the outskirts of some wood to watch the day drift off to sleep in the opal colors of the evening.

Love-maddened prairie chickens danced on the sand hillocks, heedless of everything but mating. Riel saw them come out of the brush, their necks

outstretched, their heads wagging, scampering along on their webbed toes and humming a purring melody that seemed a hymn to the glory of mating. The cocks, their throats bristling, stalked about vainly and importantly. Then they would revolve awkwardly in one spot, swinging about heavily on their feathered legs, until finally they would raise their pointed tails and show a nude rump, ridiculously obscene. Thereupon all the hens would break into admiring clucks of love and desire. . . . A new Riel, turned philosopher, remarked that these habits were "human" on the whole, and he would leave laughing so boisterously that he would frighten the entire company into a clapping of wings and a series of ka . . . wa . . . that were like terrified warnings.

While the sky, washed of its tinge of pink, was arraying itself in a sequence of different colored gauzes, first in greens, then more and more in blues—up to those spangled with gold—the first howl rose from a neighboring thicket. It was, Riel knew, a she-wolf uttering her cry of tenderness, restlessness and love. "Gna . . . gna . . . hoo . . . hee . . . ee . ." said the voice, and the half-breed, a son of hunters, translated it:

"Where are you, my darling man-wolf? . . ."

No doubt the mother was playing with her children near her den, stopping from time to time to utter her cry of love and impatience. And not far away, another voice, more serious, (with a trifle of harshness in it) replied: "Gna . . . gna . . . hee . . . I 'm coming. . . . Hee . . . ee . . . ee . . . I love you, Mrs. Wolf, don't get excited . . ." (And a minute later, the first voice): "Gna . . . gna . . . hee . . . Try to bring back a nice hare for your darling wife and kids. . . ."

And in this duet, Riel felt the entire palpitant soul of the forest steeped in exalted, violent love, ready for the necessary and definitive acts of the drama of life.

Riel was brother to the wolves. Like them, he was on the edge of civilization; and like them too, he was obliged to beg or steal his subsistence from whatever poultry-yard of civilization he could. . . . Ah! the prairie bathed in emerald and silver sunshine. And the mysterious forest with its gleaming parasols through whose lace there filters at times an obstinate ray of sun. . . . Then, unexpectedly, the puddle of water which had been until then mournful and taciturn, begins to sing like the facets of a diamond. . . .

The Indian blood in him held sway. . . . (With great pains he had liberated himself from a certain memory, the only one which really held him to the white race.) . . . Though more of an Indian, he became, however, less savage. Contempt took the place of resignation, and gave him a little indulgence for others. He was sometimes seen to stop before a cottage made of reddish turf or the trunks of hoary trees and accept a plateful of fried bacon and boiled potatoes, hotcakes with maple syrup, or a piece of huckleberry pie covered with cream. . . . He talked little, however, and changed the conversation as soon as it touched upon the "Insurrection." But he listened obligingly to the old man's hunting stories, thanked the old woman amiably for her hospitality, and said a word to the young girls, which made them toss on their cots at night, bitten with the desire for love and longing for the sleep which never came.

It was Marie Belhumeur who succeeded in catching Riel. . . . She was not at all ugly. She had black, twinkling eyes, somewhat almond-shaped, a slightly turned-up nose, rather thick lips, that revealed strong, white teeth when she smiled. Her brown hair, parted in the middle, was braided

and gathered in a knot at the back of her head, held together by a large butterfly bow, which was the fashion in that section. She had been educated in a convent which she had left with a school-teacher's certificate. She taught school at Fort-Ellice, a few miles away from Riel's school.

In a high, light-wheeled buggy harnessed to a single black and white horse, Riel, with his left arm around Marie, drove along the wooded roads of the rolling prairie. Theirs was a slow, tranquil, silent idyl.

Marie Belhumeur was inclined to reverie, and the pressure of Riel's hand on her side made her timidly lower her head. She would try to look constrained, but she would succeed only in looking deliciously pleased. She was waiting for some obstacle which might suddenly raise one of the wheels of the vehicle and throw her against Riel in such a way that it could only end in a kiss. And these kisses, which she found too rare for her liking, were enjoyed deeply, until she felt an overwhelming desire to belong to him whom she loved.

She became hostile toward the great dark herds of horses and oxen which spotted the billowing prairie, because Riel would forget her for an instant, when he gazed at them.

In the evening, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Napoleon Moreau, where she stayed, she listened with a visible anger to the indiscreet and sometimes lively jokes which the old people would make about her love affair with Riel. And from day to day she became more and more irritated over the indecision which the half-breed displayed concerning the publication of the banns.

The reason for Riel's hesitancy was that his friends might call him back to public life. . . . He often had horrible, strange nightmares. . . . Against the background of insurrection, he saw a rope winding in and out that was destined to hang him. But even more serious was the fact that he often felt a twitching of the calf of his right leg, which for him was a sign of some misfortune. This is another of the peculiar gifts which nature has bestowed upon the half-breeds. A hunter will tell you: "I have a pain in my left side. . . . I'll kill a doe to-morrow. . . ." And naturally, the event takes place.

"Poor Elzéar Goulet, who was murdered by the English," sighed Riel. "With him, Lépine and Janvier Ritchot I carried Scott's body away in

the night . . . the darkness was peopled with shimmering phantoms that wailed in time with the noise of the sled's runners. . . . He had weights on his feet. . . . The hole was black and square, and the water went: flouc . . . flouc . . . flouc. . . . The jagged ice was dark and its surface was like the blade of a hatchet. . . . Flouc . . . flouc . . . flouc. . . . The body spattered us when we threw it in. . . . Ah! good God! but it was heavy! Yes, it spattered us. . . . We stared at one another, the four of us, and immediately turned our heads. . . . Flouc . . . flouc . . . flouc. . . . Our hearts were no longer in our work. . . . The night and the silence were as heavy as a coffin-lid. . . . Flouc . . . flouc . . . flouc. . . . If I could only awaken from that terrible dream. . . .”

And each time that the implacable nightmare came, with its bony finger, to hammer the half-breed's brain, he ran out of his cabin, which had suddenly become uninhabitable, peopled as it was with moans, lamentations and reproaches . . . and then the perjured woman's cry of agony. He would plunge into the night, dragging his fever through the crumpled grass where each dew-drop reflected a twinkling star.

It was a summer day in 1881.

He had taken her buggy-riding along a narrow deserted road filled with jolting ruts which wound through the wood, twisting and twining about the tree-stumps, rolling along gently over the prairie, rising above the huts. The swamp near which they stopped swarmed with vicious mosquitoes, and it was surrounded by blue rushes with long swaying stems. The ground about them trembled. There was a perverse mixture of the odor of slime and the smell of mint. They watched the ducks frolicking, teaching their young to swim. The young ducks flapped about awkwardly. . . . Large gray clouds floated past lazily in the sky, and the water in the pond seemed as lusterless as pewter. Suddenly the wind tore open the clouds and flung their tattered rags toward the north, like cast-off clothing. All of the sky's azure poured through the torn places, falling in torrents into the water, and stretching out in large concentric sheets, as far as the foamy fringe of the water's edge. The sun kindled the tops of the trees. . . . For a moment they stood silent. . . . Slowly the sun sank in the west. . . . It seemed to halt a moment to riddle the pond with a thousand dazzling arrows which struck the water only to re-

bound immediately in barbs of light. It was so violent that Riel would have sworn he heard the invisible bow bending and unbending, and the arrows ringing against the target.

Then something softened in his heart. He felt a stupidly futile desire to cry, which was resolved into a nervous laugh. And, as Marie looked at him in astonishment, he put his arm about her shoulders, and drawing her to him, between two kisses, he murmured:

“We’ll go to-morrow to have the banns published!”

CHAPTER NINE

*We are poor little lambs who have
lost our way . . . Baa . . . baa . . .
baa . . .*

KIPLING

RIEL had gone hunting.

He went to set the rabbit traps and grouse snares on the outskirts of a field of wheat, whose slender stalks were beginning to tassel, and whose leaves grasshoppers were devouring with a clicking noise like steel springs.

Marie, dressed in blue and white checked gingham, her head protected from the July sun by a red handkerchief with white polka dots, was laboriously hoeing her garden. Drops of perspiration trickled down the ends of the unmanageable, glossy strands of hair which had come loose. Moving backward along the entire length of the furrow, she loosened the soil with little strokes of her hoe. The sun gleamed on the black clods of earth upturned by the hoe, while the soil swarmed with an entire world of pink worms and silvery

larvæ. From time to time the gardener turned to cast a look of anxious tenderness toward the house. It was a poor cabin of barked tree trunks, skillfully squared and covered with shingles painted bright red. It was shaded by a few stunted aspens. Between them hung a net hammock in which a little girl two years old, tawny and chubby-cheeked, was playing with a rag-doll.

When the row of potatoes was finished, Marie Riel could not work any longer. She dropped her hoe, wiped her strong brown hands on her dress (already soiled), and approached the little girl. She stroked her black curls on which, from time to time, a ray of sun cast bronze-colored lights. The child, letting go of the doll, clung to her mother's skirts as she struggled up and rubbed herself against Marie's legs with the grace of a little cat.

But Marie gave her only an occasional caress. Like most primitive women, all her affection was for her latest-born, and this latest-born, who was a boy and so fat that his eyes were hardly visible, was peacefully sleeping in the hammock, unaware of the impudent blue flies buzzing around him in the swaying shadows of the leaves.

She was leaning over to awaken the baby, her

breasts being heavy with milk, when she heard the clatter of several horses' hoofs on the road. "At least one of them is lame," she thought, for the hesitation between the third and fourth steps was very noticeable.

Almost immediately there appeared, mounted on ponies covered with sweat and dust, three horsemen whose long legs hung way down. Marie saw them stop and consult each other. Then one of them, a swarthy giant, almost as tall as Riel himself, she judged, got down from his horse. He lifted his broad-brimmed hat, and revealed a face that seemed all jawbone.

Advancing toward Marie, the man asked:

"Isn't this where Mr. Louis Riel lives?"

He rolled his hat around in his great paws which were covered with grease from the bridle.

"And what do you want with Riel?" said the young woman, distrustful, without knowing why.

The stranger smiled.

"I'm his cousin. Gabriel Dumont is my name. And the boys with me are his cousins too: Napoleon Naud, dead André's boy, and Michel Dumas. If you're Mrs. Riel, you're our cousin too, and we're pleased to meet you. As we are on our way

from Tortoise Mountain, we dropped in to have a smoke with our cousin."

"Yes," said Marie. "It's me who's Mrs. Riel; and it's here we live. That there's the house he built three years ago when he married me. . . . Don't know if there's room in the barn because Louis's always been careful with his horses, and I don't like to take 'em out without his telling me to. But you can take 'em down to the little pasture, down there." She pointed to a thicket of bluish aspen-trees twenty yards away. "There's plenty of wild peas. The bucket is hanging in the stable. The well is right there. When Louis comes back he'll give you some oats, there's plenty."

She pronounced these last words with a pride befitting the wife of a man capable of providing abundantly. As Gabriel Dumont, leading his lame pony by the reins, and followed by his two silent companions, started toward the clump of trees indicated, she called them back to say hospitably:

"Cousin, soon as you've taken care of your horses, come in the house. I'll get things ready so you can clean up, and I'll fix something for you to eat. It makes you hungry and thirsty to travel on the road, and I don't know if Louis'll be back before another good two hours."

When the three men entered the house, Marie Riel had already lighted the fire and the snowy lard was melting and crackling in the pan. With a sign of the head she indicated the enamel basin and wrinkled towel, and the men, taking off their coats, appeared in black sateen shirts, stained at the armpits, and began to wash themselves with much spluttering and splattering. . . . They then sat down on a bench, which Riel had made, and smoked in silence, while Marie took the slices of bacon, browned to a turn, from the stove. She then used the grease to fry potatoes which the child brought, one by one, to her mother in the folds of her dress. Her fat legs were those of a well-nourished child, tanned and dirty like a healthy animal who has been raised in the open air and sun.

Gabriel Dumont caught up the little girl and tried to kiss her. But she puckered her mouth and began to cry. Upon which the three men took some small change from their pockets and gave it to her. Her fright immediately ended, and she ran away to play with the pretty bright coins, without paying attention to her mother who called to her:

“Hey! little savage! Say thank-you to your uncles!”

Then excusing herself to the "uncles," Marie Riel added:

"You mustn't mind what children do, they don't know how to behave!"

She then put some cracked plates of heavy crockery, but irreproachably clean, on the table, a cut-glass saucer (chipped), in which was floating a lump of butter, some light white bread, bacon and potatoes, a jar of huckleberry jam, a teapot, a Chinese porcelain cup and two of pewter, a brimming sugar-bowl, and a glass in which gleamed a cluster of teaspoons. It was not until she had attended to the needs of her guests that she excused herself to feed her latest-born.

Dumont let out a cry and rushed to the hammock, took the child up himself, delicately holding its head in his great spatular fingers, and placed it in the arms of the young woman. Very modestly, she drew a net curtain before her, behind which she opened her waist and gave the child breasts striped with blue veins, the nipples of which were surrounded by a halo of mauve.

The three famished men ate in silence, except for the voracious noise of their jaws and the rattling of their plates and forks. The sucking of the baby could be heard, and at times it stopped

suddenly. Then the mother made a terrible threat. She pointed to Gabriel Dumont and said to the child:

“Take your milk or Uncle Dumont’ll drink it!”

There was a cry of joy outside, and the little girl shot across the sunny entrance-way like a shadow, crying:

“Papa! Papa! My Papa!”

“There’s Louis coming back,” said Marie.

Riel’s tall figure was seen to stoop down, then straighten up, and he arrived carrying the child in his left arm. From time to time he leaned over to kiss her. When he reached the door he put her down and flung a hare and four or five prairie chickens onto the uneven floor. They were tied together by their feet, and lay in a confusion of red and silver. He put his hands over his eyes to look at the unexpected visitors, who rose to greet him spontaneously.

“Gabriel Dumont!” exclaimed Riel.

The two men had not seen each other for a good many years, and although they recognized each other at first glance, they were necessarily astonished at the changes that time had wrought.

Gabriel Dumont, with his heavy jaw, was almost fifty. The fore part of his head was bald and

there were a few strands of white in his untrimmed black hair which fell from the top of his head to his shoulders in shiny braids, according to the ancient custom of the prairie. In spite of his whiskers, wrinkles lined his face. Riel noticed, too, that his mouth was bitter and twisted by years of poverty. But the fire in his eyes had not changed since the time, long past, when Gabriel Dumont, the best shot on the prairie, living alone in the midst of hostile Indians, had appeared now and then in Red River, where it was said of him that he was a warrior without fear and without pity.

Riel, on the contrary, after three years of peaceful family life, had become younger. His beard was carefully trimmed, and his hair was cut quite short, like a white man's. His features had lost their bitterness, and his blue eyes wandered about, calm and profound, with a smiling interrogation.

The two men shook hands, and Dumont called his companions by name: Michel Dumas, who was thin and beardless, with a round, coppery, shining face, and Napoleon Naud, who was angular, with an arched nose, and whose thin face was barred by a great, drooping mustache, reddened by tobacco.

Riel seated himself at the table. He told Marie not to hurry and to nurse the child before she cooked more food for the master of the house.

He listened with a deep interest to Gabriel Dumont's story of the long trip which the three men had just made across the prairie, "riding towards the sun at noon and always headed south," after passing the wooded Saskatchewan valleys, "where there's lots of fish and moose and deer, old man," crossing the swamps and the undergrowth of willow that covers the country between the two branches of the river, then going over the winding, bare prairie, covered with sparse bison-grass, where all but salt water is scarce, and where "there were antelopes bucking about in a cloud of brown dust." Dumont deplored the disappearance of buffaloes, due to the stupid improvidence of the Whites, and the unbounded avidity of the Hudson Bay Company. They had encountered only a ridiculously small herd. However, antelopes were still numerous, and he illustrated with gestures a hunt which had procured them a good provision of "dry" meat.

Then he immediately began to speak of the situation between the half-breeds and the English. The English—Dumont watched for the effect of

his words on Riel's face—the English were beginning to treat the half-breeds with unbelievable insolence. They were trying to treat them like wild "barbarians," destined to disappear before the onslaughts of civilization. This civilization, moreover, consisted in inculcating the young with a desire for a great many useless things which the prairie had done without until then, and which it could do without until the end of the world. Ah! those English! they were profiting by their knowledge of unjust laws. Yes, of unjust laws, continued Gabriel Dumont, thanks to which they never give the poor half-breeds their just dues! . . . Like their brothers at Red River, the Saskatchewan half-breeds had laid claim to certain lands, two hundred and forty acres per head. . . . But the "sons-of-bitches" (Napoleon Naud approved the curse with a nod of his head), the "sons-of-bitches" pretended that Article 18 was an agreement only with the half-breeds of Manitoba.

At this moment, Riel becoming warmly, even violently interested, intervened. He jerked his head backward and slapped his thigh with the palm of his large hand.

"The rotten liars! The bastards!" he expostulated. "Then, if they have no obligations toward

the half-breeds of the Northwestern territories, if their bloody Article only refers to the Manitoba half-breeds, that looks to me as if the territories weren't bought by the Dominion, and that down there it's still our own country and not the Englishmen's. . . . No pay, no merchandise."

"That's exactly what Father Ernest told me. You know him, the Father of the Oblates, little Father Ernest," cried Gabriel Dumont, delighted. "Yes, the rotten bastards. They won't give us any land—the land that *you* earned for us. They refuse to let our children speak French there, or to let us have separate schools to teach them their catechism . . . the thieves. . . ."

"Well, what are you fellows going to do about it?" asked Riel.

"Oh! we don't want to let ourselves be taken in like that, you can be sure, cousin. We've got our heart in the right place, us half-breeds, cousin. You know that yourself. And there's still some guns in the half-breeds' storehouses."

"That," interrupted Riel, "that's damn madness . . . the English are bastards, bloody thieves . . . but they're strong, the dirty dogs. They've got money, soldiers. . . ."

Dumont chuckled:

"Soldiers? Those red coats? You're joking," Dumont chuckled. "They can't shoot . . . they can't ride . . . they can't walk . . . and they haven't got any more heart than an old dog. . . . the *matchicounas!* Them, soldiers? One half-breed is worth a hundred of 'em. . . ."

Riel nodded his head and made a wry face, because his right leg, the one of bad presentiments, was hurting him. Making no reply to Gabriel, he began to pulverize some plug tobacco between his palms. As he was about to fill his pipe, Dumont took him by the arm, and part of the tobacco spilled onto the table. While the former chief of the half-breeds gathered it up, carefully picking out the bread-crumbs, his interlocutor continued:

"Excuse me, cousin . . . but you see, we're brave; we're armed, but we lack a chief. We came to fetch you for that."

"Oh no!" cut in Riel, sharply.

He remembered the insurrection of 1869-70, and he did not have the slightest desire to experience man's stupidity and ingratitude again.

"But cousin, in God's name, can you leave us like this, in the dung-heap? We're in the dung-heap now, and how are we going to get out of it . . . us half-breeds? We've got no education.

You, you're a school-teacher, you've got education. . . .”

“Enough to know that we're not the stronger. I learned that lesson all right.”

“Me, I didn't learn it. If I had I wouldn't have asked you to be our chief. . . . I'd have made myself chief.”

“Me, I learned it twice,” muttered Riel. “Once in school, a long time ago . . . another time at Red River, fourteen or fifteen years ago.”

He broke into a rage and continued angrily:

“And what did I get for it? My hide . . . yes . . . my hide. I had land guaranteed to the half-breeds. I made 'em recognize religious liberty for the Catholics. But look at me, I haven't got any lands to defend, except for this miserable little acre. . . . I did well to get out with a shirt on my back. . . . My two hundred and forty acres in Canada, confiscated. They took everything. . . .”

“And who did all that, cousin? The half-breeds, or the English?”

“Did you half-breeds help me out? When I was handling the affair alone, you beat it to the Northwest with all your buffaloes and your fat horses from Saskatchewan. Did you help me? When we had meetings everybody was ready to talk, but

no one wanted to act. Yes, Janvier Ritchot? Where's he? Dead. Lépine? In exile, like me. Goulet? Where's he? Murdered by the English. You fellows didn't lift your little finger to help me, to save me from exile! To keep Lépine from leaving! To avenge Goulet! Bah! you're a weak-kneed set of men . . . and you come for me now! You ought to have helped me out fourteen years ago. There wouldn't have been an Englishman left in Canada. . . .”

“But Father Ernest. . . .”

“Father Ernest? The rotter! . . .”

“Oh! Louis!” exclaimed Marie, scandalized.

“A priest!”

“Be quiet! Marie. The priests needed to say only a word to make Lower Canada revolt. . . . Yes, I’m telling you so. We’d have kicked them out, the English. . . . As for me, I’ve remade my life. I’m happy. I’ve got my woman, my kids and enough to eat. . . . Canada? To hell with it!”

He seemed to vomit out his profound loathing of human ingratitude. He wrinkled his nose as if he were disgusted by the people who had made him their chief, whom he had found incapable of a common action, and who, thanks to him, having won their rights, had with supine indifference per-

mitted him to be exiled. He was thinking—his right leg twitched—he was thinking that like the half-breeds of Red River, the half-breeds of Saskatchewan, at the last moment, would lose all interest in his fate, and that the bait of English gold would suffice to make Judases of them.

"I won't go," he repeated in a hollow voice.

At this remark Marie advanced toward him, and placed her hand on his shoulder.

"Look here, Louis," she said. "You're a great man. A man that I've always admired. Are you going to abandon them? . . . The half-breeds . . . the French language . . . our holy religion?"

The young woman's forehead was wrinkled with pain and care. She would have liked to cry out to Riel everything she felt—that he had dazzled her by his fame and that her adoration imperiously demanded the flaming light of glory. . . . But how to express such ideas, when one was inarticulate? However, her eyes, her hands begged him. Her lips formed a desperate appeal. She flung the weight of her entire love in the balance. . . .

Riel looked at her. A sudden sadness overcame him. For a moment he lowered his head wearily, as if he bore the burden of all the unhappiness in

the world. For he knew now that he would go, although he repeated obstinately:

"It's damned madness!"

With the precipitance of a man who dives into the water, Riel gave his resignation as school-teacher, sold his furniture and the greater part of his belongings, bought a small tent, a wagon, two good horses, and headed north. The three half-breeds rode alongside Riel's wagon. Naud and Dumas, who rarely spoke, amused themselves during halts by doing acrobatic stunts. To keep his hand in, Gabriel Dumont with a marvelous aim shot on the wing the prairie chickens that flew noisily about the hoofs of his lame pony.

A dry heat absorbed all the dampness of the earth, wilted the grayish-blue tufts of sparse bison-grass, dwarfish and savory. It cast a vaporous haze over the distant regions, outlining the horizon with blue and veiling the cloudless sky with faded mauve.

When they stopped for the night, the three hunters slept in the open air under worn-out covers. The men took turns watching for the horses whose fore-legs had been hobbled. While the black silhouettes of the horses leaped awk-

wardly about in the darkness, Riel shut himself in his tent with Marie. In the light of a sooty lamp Marie would put the two children to bed on buffalo robes.

With extraordinary avidity, Riel would then enjoy his wife's love, embracing her fiercely, with a passion that was increased tenfold by the uncertainty of living.

"At least," he said to himself, "if I must die in this cursed affair, I'll take all the love and tenderness that life can give me. Poor Marie, who loves me and whom I love, will lose me through the stupidity of our pride."

And after their love-making, when Marie had fallen into a profound sleep on her husband's shoulder, Riel, his eyes wide open in the darkness, asked himself if the darkness resembled the darkness of a grave.

Their arrival was the occasion for merry-making in the Saskatchewan valley. . . . Riel grew impatient when he saw that all these people who had been in such a hurry to have him come were now thinking only of drinking, eating, singing, playing the violin and dancing, whereas he wanted to act. For Riel understood that first of all it was

necessary to act quickly, and that the English were much stronger in the country than they had been in Manitoba, in 1869.

But he was confronted by: "Don't rush about so, there's plenty of time," which irritated him like a broken wheel during a journey. Father Ernest himself, superior of the Oblates, who had been so anxious to have Riel come, poured forth a volley of useless words, from which no general plan could be drawn. National sentiment, which was for the half-breed chief the essential factor of success in a rebellion, left the priest indifferent. France, the half-breeds' motherland, meant nothing to him.

"France! Ah! no! . . . A republic which repudiates divine right and upholds French Masons is worse than the Orangeists of Ontario. A country governed by Gambetta or Lockroy! Ah! no! We've nothing in common. The Catholic question first. The Catholic question. . . ."

Upon which, Riel becoming impatient, retorted:

"Rome is one thing! National sentiment is another. . . . Let's not mix religion and politics!"

Then, Father Ernest went over the entire country venting complaints which discouraged the half-breeds and kept the English well informed of Riel's plans.

"Riel," he said, "is a damned fool. Not at all the man I thought he was. He wants to change our entire religion. He's a heretic!"

In the fall, when October silhouetted horizons of rust and copper against a many-colored sky, the discussions became more heated. Already, many half-breeds, worked up by the missionary, were beginning to reproach Riel for his "paganism." He, however, believed himself to be profoundly Christian, and the unjust accusation wounded him deeply.

It was even worse when some days later Marie expressed the desire to go back home. She did not admit to her husband that the Saskatchewan half-breeds disgusted her, nor that she had great difficulty in defending herself against drunkards who with their whiskey-laden breath made direct and lewd propositions to her.

She feared her husband's anger too much to repeat the remarks which were made to her several times daily, sometimes while Riel was talking not ten paces away. The half-breed chief would have insisted on knowing the names and a few men would have felt his vengeance. So she limited herself to pleadings, lamentations and tears, not

knowing what pretext to give except boredom and the desire to return to Montana. She lied badly, as does everybody who lacks imagination.

This feigned ennui put Riel in a bad humor. For the first time he treated her with violence and ill-temper.

"You should have thought of that before. Now it's too late. . . . So you're bored! You shouldn't have made me come. Leave by yourself if you want to, I'm staying. . . . I'd rather die than to go back and be taken for a fool. . . . And if I die, that'll be your punishment, do you hear?"

He burst into a laugh, a savage laugh. . . . Before the sudden picture of his corpse, her head dropped between her hands. Her beautiful black hair fell about her shoulders and her back shook with convulsive sobs. However, she raised her head and implored Riel, with her troubled eyes, with all her features, which had grown suddenly older through her terrible suffering. But he sneered cruelly. . . . She sat silent, her jaw twitching, and her wide mouth opening and closing dully.

He shrugged his shoulders, angry and contemptuous, because he believed that it was only a case of feminine capriciousness. . . . When she clasped her hands to implore him, he jeered at

her. Marie stiffened, there was a flash of anger in her glance, so hot that it instantly dried the tears in her eyes. . . . At that moment she wished for the most varied things, the best and the worst. But Riel refused to continue the quarrel and left to indulge in the vanity of idle talk.

It continued like this all winter. Marie did not face her husband with either cries of distress or angry appeals, but with a mute, sullen hostility. He, therefore, left her alone more often than his political agitations required, and he carried his rancor with him to noisy, stupid gatherings.

In the meanwhile, the English were wandering about the country. They talked little, and the most rattleheaded person could have seen that espionage was their aim. They were well provided with bad whiskey, thanks to which they were welcomed everywhere, or almost everywhere. The whiskey loosened the drunkards' tongues, and after the third glass, the strangers obtained all sorts of contradictory information about Riel and Gabriel Dumont. At times, if the drunkard were well-disposed, there was a way of letting him understand that Riel and Gabriel Dumont had in mind only the sordid desire to profit by their brothers. This

calumny did its work, running through the under-brush with the quickness of a hunted ermine. Riel, having been warned, did not dare to openly drive out the intruders. The Mounted Police of Carlton and Fort Pitt would have immediately taken advantage of the occasion to intervene in a most disagreeable way. But from day to day the half-breed chief saw that the situation was becoming worse. He talked it over with Dumont, who proposed to stir up the Cree Indians, with whom his reputation as a hunter had considerable influence. Riel agreed, and Dumont went off across the woods on his long snow-shoes, under which the frozen snow went crrree . . . crrree . . . and which left the imprint of his heavy tracks in the underbrush.

Riel's heart could find no peace. Father Ernest, in a moment of enthusiasm, had promised him that the clergy would stir up Lower Canada. . . . Now, each time the half-breed asked him for definite news concerning this excellent political project, the priest changed the subject. Putting his hands into the wide sleeves of his cassock, rolling his uneasy eyes from left to right, then, looking at the end of his nose with a troubled air, he would say: "God will attend to it in good time."

Then, when he had recovered himself, the lay monk would take the offensive and reproach Riel for being a bad Christian.

"God will punish you. God will punish you. . . . Ah! you defy the Church! You told me one day that Rome was a subject of discord, which shouldn't be mixed with politics. And now you come to ask the support of the clergy? . . . Ah! Riel! Riel! if you fail, it will be because God wanted to chastise you. You will be the example!"

Riel shrugged his shoulders without replying. His defeat at Red River had given him serious doubts as to the infallibility of the Catholic clergy, and (which seemed to him more serious) his own. He was beginning to perceive that his grammar school education could make a passable school-teacher of him, but that it was insufficient to give him the necessary weapons with which to conquer a nation that was protected by men of action and organization. Undoubtedly the half-breeds never tired of hearing him talk, though they astonished him at times with their confused remarks and senseless arguments. But they appeared to be incapable of action other than that exacted by the most elementary life; wood-cutting, deer-hunting,

trapping furred animals, warming and clothing themselves, eating. . . . And himself, was he capable of organization? Sincerely, no! . . . He was conscious of going to his ruin, and dragging others along with him. . . . Should it be permitted? . . . Yes, he replied. The louts think only of getting drunk, of satisfying their vulgar lusts. What difference would it make if they perished? And wouldn't it be better to die making a noble effort than to perish of poverty and vice? . . . And himself? . . . Marie had become odious to him ever since he had begun to believe she was a prey to the most unreasonable whims. Was he going to drag out for years the stupid and empty existence of defeat and resignation? He preferred a glorious suicide. . . .

A sudden sympathy brought him back to Dumont, Dumas and Naud. They were brutes and he felt that they were ready to kill and to die. . . . The memory of Scott came to his mind. He hated that victim whom he saw again: a blood-soaked rag, by the side of an enraged drunkard. . . . What had become of Pat O'Donoghue? . . . He would have made a good executioner. Hah! Yes, Pat O'Cork. . . . Riel tried to recall the verses of his funny song: "*The curves of her thighs are*

as round as an apple." . . . And then? . . . Bah! what's the difference? . . . Old Pat!

He promised himself that as soon as spring came, English blood would avenge his disappointments. . . . Then Gabriel Dumont returned. He had seen the Cree chiefs, and they were all ready to go on the war-path against the English. . . . The big half-breed told Riel how he was received by one of the Indians, *Wah-Wah-Seh-Owa* (Well-Dressed-Man).

Gabriel had found the savage in the act of dispensing justice. The chief was holding court in a huge pyramidal teepee, in the center of which smoldered a tiny fire. He was dressed in a worn blanket, and smoked calmly while a man and two women shouted contradictions in a tone of the most vehement anger, gesticulating at the same time. In the midst of the bellowing and screaming, Dumont had to muster up all his knowledge of the Cree language to understand that the woman was accusing the man of having deserted her, without valid reasons, to live with his mistress. The chief, his red clay pipe in his mouth, assumed an air of detachment entirely similar to that of a white magistrate. His face lighted up when he saw, in the half-breed's arrival, a providential diversion

from this complicated and unimportant problem. He arose and with a wave of his hand dismissed the three tiresome people, with the following decision:

"The queen-squa-comec (the scamp) had left one wench to take another wench, and the two must settle the mess themselves."

Seeing that the chief was well-disposed toward him, Gabriel immediately profited by the occasion to tell him of his mission. He received the following reply:

"All right. . . . It's a long time since I killed any white-skinned dogs. . . . Thank your friend Riel for the pleasure he offers me, and tell him I'll arrange with the other chiefs, my brothers, to raise four or five hundred warriors."

In the high latitudes of Canada, after its wintry coma of six months, nature is in a hurry to resume life. Everything was asleep under the soiled shroud of dirty snow. One beautiful day a wind from the southwest, in spite of the barrier of the Rocky Mountains, brought its warmth from the far-off Pacific Ocean, which is warmed by the thermo-siphon of the Kouro-Shivo. It is a violent, continuous wind whose course can be followed with

the eye, and it can be seen, in irregular successive waves, tarnishing the snow's luster, kneading the soft bits into a porous dough. Then water begins flowing from everywhere, carrying along with it what seem to be innumerable reflections torn from the sun's light. The worn-out shroud rots, cracks and falls into pieces, and the earth appears healthy, only a little cold, and trembling. It was not dead, only asleep, cataleptic perhaps. The first plants begin to sprout timidly, drinking in great draughts the puddles of water. The crows appear, impudent and noisy, thoroughly vulgar—upstarts in black robes—determined to claim their rights to all carrion. The ducks follow in couples, somewhat ridiculous, already very much in love, looking for a furnished abode of reeds and dwarf willows to build their nests with and a pool to play in and wash themselves. The buds burst forth as if they were in a great hurry, the leaves take on a greenish tint, too light, too gaudy, which they with good sense do not keep, but change little by little to a more harmonious color, wisely tinged with blue. Mosquitoes in myriads hatch in every drop of water, and fly in buzzing, irritatingly cruel swarms. As soon as the foliage can modestly screen their deeds, invisible beings fill the forest

with amorous desires, voluptuous palpitations, unappeased lusts. No, this was not death, it was sleep, and now life was returning with vengeance.

The spring of 1885 was sparkling and passionate. But while the banks of the Saskatchewan were tumbling down with a great noise into the turbulent waters, and the drifting tree trunks bumped into each other with a great crackling noise, men, indifferent to nature, devoted themselves to the ridiculous pastime of politics.

The half-breeds' meetings were becoming more and more noisy, under the influence of whiskey. . . . There were several thousand jabbering, noisy drunkards who became intoxicated in an instant when it was a question of fighting. Only fifty of them, with Gabriel Dumont, Naud and Dumas, decided upon a manifestation of force which, in their minds, should be sufficient to obtain for them all of the rights they demanded.

Pedantic by profession, Riel assumed the rather strange title of *Exovede*, meaning to show no doubt that he held himself outside the herd. Unarmed, he joined these madmen, as much out of boredom, perhaps, as weariness. And although he was determined to be only a cynical and disinterested spectator, he was the one whom they en-

thusiastically acclaimed as leader, in spite of his protests. He accepted, although he insisted that he had not announced himself as a candidate. His election angered Gabriel Dumont who, having noticed for some time that Riel was thoroughly disgusted, naturally aspired to take his place. But Dumont, although a well-built man, nevertheless had less prestige.

On the other hand, Major MacDuff, who commanded a few small police detachments at Fort Pitt, did his utmost to get them together. Several hundred volunteers augmented the little troop. It was a wonderful occasion for the exalted Orangeists to display their gaudy banner embroidered with the slogan: *Neither Pope, nor Pretender.*

Fort Pitt became a sort of covenant out of which psalms and obscene songs mounted toward the Lord. Reverend MacDonald was obliged to apply the law which punished all blasphemers by a fine. They were many, and as the law recompenses the accuser with one-half of the proceeds of the fine, it was an occasion for the clever ones to make hay while the sun shone. Reverend MacDonald seemed to be the cleverest of them all. He enjoyed under-cover work and moreover had a family whom he

wished to support. It is to be presumed that he succeeded very well, for after a few days he appeared with a new umbrella (an unusual luxury), large gold-rimmed glasses, and a celluloid collar which gave him a most surprising air of cleanliness.

The two troops encountered each other between Forts Pitt and Carlton. Both sides were more gay than fierce, and at the bottom of their hearts was the firm conviction that it would amount to nothing. The first simultaneous movement of the two sides was to right-about-face and to stand at ease, shouting useless insults at the top of their voices. It is not exactly known why the Reverend MacDonald opened his umbrella. The exhibition of this monstrous product of civilization was considered a challenge by Riel's friends, and Osias Ouellette, among many others, was not the man to receive such an insult. A moment later the pastor was rolling on the ground, somewhat bruised, his glasses broken, one end of his celluloid collar jabbing into the turkey-like folds of his skinny neck. Riel, profoundly saddened and discouraged, was struggling with Osias Ouellette. The latter had just displayed a frantic desire to plunge the um-

brella into the pastor's insides, and to open it there. But the great import of this philosophical act, in so far as a definite insult to civilization was concerned, escaped the half-breed chief. . . . At this moment the English Major read a summons, to which the half-breeds naturally responded by taking aim. This gesture was interpreted by the militiamen as an invitation (which they obeyed) to throw down their arms. They then gave themselves up as prisoners, which was the greatest possible embarrassment to the half-breeds, for it was not in the least easy for fifty men to guard five hundred. Riel advised that their weapons be taken from them, and that they be lodged at Fort Pitt since the garrison of this fortification was on the march.

This was done.

From Fort Pitt, Dumont drew up a ridiculous ultimatum to the English government. Riel, half furious, half joking, refused to sign the document, which was sent to the Marquis of Lansdowne, Governor General of Canada, who was a grave and solemn person, absolutely incapable of appreciating a really Gallic farce. This statesman, instead of receiving it in the same spirit, replied to

this April Fool's joke by mobilizing, with one stroke, the three divisions which constituted the Canadian army. He supplied them with all the available artillery and munitions, convoked the entire military force of the country, and gave formal and emphatic orders to General Middleton.

The Orangeists, who still resented Scott's murder, arose in one body. Was it not a question of fighting against Catholicism? Riel's and Father Ernest's pictures were printed in the Ontario papers. In addition, the Information Office notified the Marquis of Lansdowne that Riel had said one day that Rome was a cause of political discord. The governor could not neglect this trump card. He had it played by the parish-priests of Lower Canada, several of whom preached throughout the province of Quebec in favor of a crusade against the heretic chief, Riel.

This they did so well that a battalion of French-Canadians, who had nothing at all to do in a British quarrel, left Montreal one day on the Canadian Pacific, bound for Winnipeg. From the coach door an ensign-bearer (intelligent as an umbrella-rack) was proudly waving the flag of his unit, embroidered with the emblem: *I Do Not Retreat*, which was sufficient to show how little

notion these people had of the art of war. When this battalion arrived at the Ottawa station, the Marquis of Lansdowne reviewed them. Until his death, when recalling this beautiful spectacle, he used to say, rubbing his hands together: "Yes, gentlemen, that was my political masterpiece."

Thanks to Smith's railroad, the army was able to concentrate its forces rapidly. It had only to appear and the insurrection would have ended without bloodshed. But General Middleton was an old military man, who, having served in the Indies, in the Crimea and Egypt, knew how to calculate to a man the percentage of losses necessary for a campaign to be worth his while from the triple viewpoint of honor, advancement and decoration. He also knew the number of losses above which surly parliaments hound the trail of a general, even a victorious one, with the obstinacy of a pack of dogs. He had determined to reach a happy medium between these two extremes. He was not a mathematician for nothing.

That is sufficient to explain why heavily armed patrols amused themselves by provoking the half-breeds at Duck Lake, then at Batoche. The evident hostility aroused by the sharpshooters, and sus-

tained by the almost harmless firing of howitzers and Gatling guns, produced the reaction in Gabriel Dumont and his fifty half-breeds the general had predicted. The British troops were driven back in an entirely satisfactory disorder, leaving on the battlefield the bright spots of a few red uniforms, which made the green attire of nature appear more somber. There were hideously dirty faces dripping blood from battered eyes and gray sticky brains; corpses stretched out on their backs, fists clenched, with a little dark hole in their chests, over which there buzzed metallic flies; dying men who moaned: "Mama, Mama . . ." then passed away with an oath and a hiccough; the pitiable wounded who dragged themselves about, begging for a drink, and whom Riel himself cared for like brothers.

Meanwhile, General Middleton's tactics were being employed with the Indians. The cavalry scouts had violated enough Cree Squaws to remind Wah-Wah-Seh-Owa (Well-Dressed-Man) of the promise he had given one day in an enthusiastic moment, long since forgotten, to Gabriel Dumont. . . . Having undressed himself, the Indian chief painted his body in cubistic emblems, and calling his brothers together, responded to English abuse

by conduct equal to theirs, servilely imitative and without real originality. . . .

He massacred English settlers, took several prisoners in order to present the classical spectacle of torture, and annoyed everyone in general, until the day when, having plundered one of the Hudson Bay Company's stores, his warriors found a sufficient quantity of alcohol to have a wild time. This booty made them believe they were the victors, and they no longer thought of anything except getting hilariously drunk.

In the meantime, General Middleton, having by way of encouragement and recompense, received the promise of a promotion which he had been expecting for some time, decided to combine his three divisions. Immediately, the fifty rebels ran away in all directions, and Riel, without really knowing why, took flight, as if he had actually participated in the rebellion.

One evening in June, quite late, he found himself safe in the United States. He lighted his fire, sheltered by a clump of aspens on the edge of a small pond in which the sun, fatally wounded, was bleeding drop by drop into a pool which spread over a mirror of oxidized silver.

He was starting his dinner, consisting of a good portion of dry meat, when Osias Ouellette, also fleeing from British vengeance, appeared. Being quite famished, the young half-breed accepted Riel's invitation, and in return told him all of the latest news which he had just learned. . . . At the very first words, Riel learned his wife and two children had fallen into the hands of General Middleton, who was holding them as hostages.

CHAPTER TEN

Two days later, near the same little lake, Riel was smoking, apparently calm, but inwardly troubled by all the worries in the world. Gabriel Dumont, a few feet away, was splicing the ropes of a wretched little worn-out tent. The blue hills in the foreground, the unreal iridescence of the Sierra glaciers rising above one another, were reflected in the mirror. Riel was awaiting the return of the messenger he had dispatched to General Middleton offering to give himself up, on condition that Marie and the two children be set free immediately. Gabriel was staying with him only to try to keep him from this "damn madness."

Dumont, who was driving tent-pegs with the back of his hatchet, turned from time to time his hairy, ham-like face, with its mouth full of strong, healthy teeth.

"You're a bloody fool I tell you." Toc-toc. . . . He hammered furiously, as if he wished to drive the peg with one blow into the stony ground and the idea into his cousin's head, equally as hard.

"But you crazy idiot, you're nothing but a baby if you think the English'll harm your old woman and papooses. Listen to what I say. Ah, you're a bloody fool, I tell you. They'll feed her and your kids, too. They'll get tired of waiting and then they'll let 'em free. You've only got to wait here. You're in the States, aren't you? You're not on English territory. Ah, damn it, I've busted the damn peg!"

But Riel was not listening and Dumont shook him roughly. Dumont had just signed a two-year contract with Buffalo Bill. The terms granted him a large sum for exhibiting his extraordinary talents as a crack shot. He described the extravagant costume of "Colonel Cody," a costume such as had never been seen on the prairie, a costume that would make "a mare in foal miscarry, old man." It comprised a Mexican cone-shaped felt hat ("like that mountain you see down there"), a red silk shirt ("handy for stopping the prairie train"), a cartridge belt ("never in the world could a man shoot them all"), leather "britches" with wide fringes ("Ah! they're great"), silver spurs as big as piastres ("must cost a lot"). The costume covered a great angular body, to which belonged a face all bones, blue eyes and broad

flaxen mustaches. His face was perpetually mobile and he was marvelously expert in swearing in a falsely angry voice.

Riel answered Dumont's arguments in a weary voice that dragged along like a wounded wolf.

"I've had enough of all these Whites. . . . Neither gold nor silver could make a monkey of me to amuse them."

"Ah, you're a bloody fool," Dumont retorted, as he whittled a new peg. "I've seen enough of the Whites too, but their piastres are good. Those who want to can laugh at 'em with their bellies empty and their ribs bare. But I prefer to swill their beer and eat their bacon and potatoes instead of dying of hunger, prowling around their bloody towns. Let 'em laugh if they want to, old man. They won't be laughing as much as this old bird whose pockets will be crammed full of their piastres. Ah, you don't want to act like a jackass. And how will you feel kicking at the end of a noose, like a lynx caught in a trap? You know how they look, their eyes popping out of their heads, their black tongues sticking out of one side of their mouths, their necks screwed around like a minister preaching, and their hands all shriveled up."

"And you think I'll be hung?" asked Riel.

Though his voice faltered ever so slightly, it did not escape Dumont's quick ear.

"Do I think so? Do I think so? Oh, those fellows love you on account of dead Scott!"

Riel could not stand it any longer. With a gesture he stopped Dumont. The latter said no more, convinced that his words had done their work and that his cousin would not give himself up.

Nevertheless, several days later, Riel was locked up in the Regina Prison. It was a new prison built of red bricks, too bright for the lugubrious black bars. He occupied a clean white cell, and he could have all the baths he wanted. But, in spite of General Middleton's promise, he had not seen either his wife or children.

While the preparations for his trial were being rushed, he was busy writing a long dissertation for his defense, in which he ascribed the first idea of the insurrection to Father Ernest. It was, indeed, this same priest who came to hear his confession in prison. Then, Riel, under penalty of eternal damnation, had to give his manuscript to the priest and promise to take upon himself the entire responsibility of the revolt.

From then on he knew he was lost. Torn between the love of life and the fear of eternal hell, he abandoned himself to contrition. With his rosary in his hands, he told the beads to the accompaniment of automatically murmured prayers.

The mere idea of having thought, for an instant, of compromising a minister of God, cost him hideous nightmares. In his dreams he was tortured by demons which had escaped from the suggestive illustrations in certain pious books. There were horned monsters with goats' beards, hooked noses, and bats' wings, who, armed with a trident, turned him over and over on his bed of burning coals. And one of them kept on saying to him in a small, tremulous, cruel voice: "Ah! Ah! Louis Riel! respect the priests! Ah! Ah! you wanted to betray Father Ernest! . . ." But Christian demons are not the only ones who assail a man with mixed blood. No one knows from what world of ancestral superstitions the "evil spirits" rose with their faces even more cruel than those of the maddened Sioux. They came to scalp him with blunt knives, to stick splinters under his finger-nails, to scrape the bottom of his feet with a sharp flint, to mutilate him with their teeth. . . . He would awake

bathed in sweat, cold, shivering, his heart pounding, and sobbing like a child. . . .

Father Ernest found him in this condition when he came to visit him about eight o'clock in the morning. The lay-monk took pleasure in listening to the description of these dreams, whose diabolical horror lay within the province of theology.

He even heightened their terror by citing specialists in demonology, and by repeating, thanks to texts he had learned by heart, the catalogue of tortures which God, in his mercy, reserved for those who accused the ministers of the true faith. Then, after he had thus reduced Riel's soul to a pulp, he suddenly renewed his hope of a glorious paradise, which would be opened to him—as to a martyr—on condition that he consent to sacrifice himself for the Church. He became indignant to see that Riel clung to his miserable life whose end would bring eternal glory.

According to the terms of the Act of George IV which at that time was still in force in the Northwestern territories, a criminal lawsuit required the presence of a justice of the King's Bench, assisted by two titulars and a jury of twelve. But the territories did not possess this luxury, and

the Orangeists who, in memory of Scott's execution, were keenly interested in Riel's trial, feared the weakness of the Ontario justices, not to mention those of Manitoba, who, because they had followed the affair too closely, considered it a simple farce in deplorably bad taste.

For this reason the active Master of the Free-masons got hold of one Richardson and a miserable little Henri Lejeune at Regina, both of them simply justices of the peace, and, quite naturally enough, influenced by their desire for advancement. Furthermore, upon hearing that it was impossible to find more than six reliable jurymen, the honorable Alexander Campbell, the Lord Chancellor of the Dominion, had an inspiration which his friends found sublime.

He availed himself of an imperial statute in force in New Brunswick which permitted five or seven jurymen to render a verdict. New Brunswick was only twelve hundred miles from the Territorial frontier, and its laws, which were provided with fantastic wings, evidently had the power to fly over three provinces of imposing dimensions. By way of confusing the whole affair still more, the Attorney General had the idea of a compromise, and he fixed the number of jurors for the

Riel trial at six. Christopher Robinson, whose nationalist sympathies were well known, was named State's Attorney.

The Regina courthouse gave the appearance of having been molded out of lard by a romantic butcher. During the dog-days of July one was surprised not to see it melt and trickle down into the street in the form of a sticky, nauseous liquid. The interior served especially for meetings of the city's various associations. Entertainments were given there, and a stage occupied the entire upper end of the court-room.

It was amid stage scenery executed by a house-painter with a contempt for all perspective that the actors of this drama were seated. The gaudy colors affected by the artist made an unreal background, whose incongruity made one dizzy. The Judges, the Prosecuting Attorney and the jurors assumed an unearthly quality which made them seem like phantoms.

No one, therefore, not even the prisoner, was astonished to see them show no surprise when the three lawyers for the defense, Greenshields, Lemieux and Fitzpatrick asked for a delay in the trial because of irregularities in the procedure.

In a mechanical voice the puppet-chief postponed it for eight days. But to pass the time as well as to placate a public that was all the more exacting because it had not paid for its seats, the trial of Riel's accomplices was immediately begun.

There then appeared several people who evidently understood nothing about the affair:—the Cree chiefs, arrested by General Middleton during the finest celebration of their lives. Their dull copper faces displayed signs of bewildered resignation to the all-powerful folly of white men. They all looked alike with the same sugar-loaf heads plastered with hair that was glued down with rancid grease, the same low flat forehead and the same slant eyes through which it would have been ridiculous to waste one's time trying to slip a ten cent piece, the same flat nose with pierced nostrils, the same thick-lipped mouth, and the same high cheek-bones. The interpreter pointed them out with his finger, one after another, and translated the Cree names into English:

“Wah-Wah-Seh-Owa: Well - Dressed - Man.”
There was laughter in the court, for the elegant gentleman was in rags. “Manaschoes: Bad Arrow.
Kitti-Maguan: Miserable Man.” (Loud applause.) “Pa-Bu-Maké-Sih: Around-the-Sky.

Apis-Chaskoes: Little Bear. Wah-Wah-Nich: Man without a Heart. Nabpace: Body-of-Iron."

Mirth was even more uncontrolled when, after a few formal questions, the puppets called Ko-Manitou-Wah, the first witness.

Whereupon there advanced a mass of sagging flesh surmounted by an angular face whose skin resembled yellow shoe-leather, worn out from hard work in swampy lands. From time to time its stumpy fingers scratched an almost nonexistent nose that looked as if it had been sketched but not modeled. The strange creature made an effort to understand the incomprehensible jargon of the White men, and to this purpose placed a hand behind one of its flat and enormous ears.

"Ko-Manitou-Wah!" the interpreter repeated and then translated the name into English, "Image-of-God."

Uproarious laughter immediately resounded through the room. The puppets themselves seemed animated by a mechanism that broke down after the first outburst of merriment. A voice jeered:

"Image-of-God. Are you sure you didn't make a mistake? Image-of-God. Image-of-the-Devil, maybe. He looks as much like God as the skin of his face looks like satin."

Because this drama of life and death was being performed for the benefit of savages, interest was centered on all the humorous aspects of the trial. The puppet-in-chief, reminded by some mysterious force of his function, called the court to order.

The witness recounted at length the massacre of a white agent. Well-Dressed-Man had slaughtered him without, however, making him suffer uselessly and had stuffed his mouth with pieces of silver and gold found in a cash-box. When Image-of-God had finished, the accused, who had followed with interest the description of this amusing little farce, asked permission to speak, in order to tell the truth of the matter.

"Ko-Manitou-Wah," he said in Cree, "protests that this man has not told all the truth. He wrongs me. Yes, I butchered the white dog, and then I put piastres he had stolen from us into his mouth, and told him to eat them. As his mouth wasn't big enough to hold all of them I put the rest somewhere else and told him to get rid of them as he could."

As soon as the interpreter had translated these words, the puppet-chief decided that they were improper and shocking, and that they must, out of respect for "Christian humanity," be stricken

from the records. He even deigned to explain his reasons to the accused who seemed to think it was the White Man's form of torture. The Indian uttered a hoarse cry, and sat down, horrified. Simple though he was, he had realized something that was more terrifying than all the Indian scalpings and tortures. It was the vision of White Justice hiding the ugliness of its soul behind a mask of false respectability. From that moment, being convinced that the Whites were an inferior and contemptible race, he no longer tried to understand them. He and his brothers wrapped themselves in a fierce, mute indifference, and when the sentence condemning them to be "hanged by the neck until dead" was translated to them, the same ironic smile spread across eight faces, and they stared at one another in delighted surprise. English stupidity had just appeared to them in all its glory. What! they wanted to torture them and all they did was to hang them? They were not to be scalped and would therefore be allowed to keep their scalp-locks by which the Spirit of Death carries Braves to the happy hunting ground which the Whites cannot enter.

They quickly regained their impassiveness, and Pa-Bu-Maké-Sih (Around-the-Sky), who was a

sorcerer, said out loud to the court something they were all thinking:

"What do we care!"

It was then Riel's turn to appear before the legal puppets.

Eight days' respite had made it possible for him to assume an expression of quiet disdain, behind which, in reality, there smoldered the hell-fires of religious torment. Father Ernest, who now dominated the prisoner's conscience, assured him that such suffering was agreeable to the Lord, who reserved it for the chosen few. However, this consolation had not kept Riel, during the two or three days of the preceding week, from displaying such nervousness that his three defenders, Greenshields, Lemieux and Fitzpatrick decided it was wise to have him examined by specialists. Unfortunately, there were only two, and as both belonged to the Orangeists lodge in Regina, their decision killed this last hope of the defense.

Indeed, it was known that the names of the witnesses for the prosecution filled a long list, composed of a large number of military men.

Christopher Robinson, attorney for the Crown, was an excellent psychologist, and he knew that a

professional military man rarely hesitates to emphasize the perils and difficulties of the battles in which he has taken part. For General Middleton and his subordinates it was a question of medals, advancements, honors, of glory: all appreciable advantages which it is only human to desire.

Riel was too intelligent not to understand that the sentence was passed in advance, and that it was useless to bicker for his life.

The mere denunciation of Father Ernest, the Catholic missionary, would have turned the Orangeists in his favor. In fact, this denunciation was anticipated by a great many. But his eternal salvation was at stake, and the half-breed felt that he had sufficient energy, after having lost the world, to attain heaven. He therefore left the useless struggle to his lawyers, and lost all interest in his tormentors.

Scott's avengers had no difficulty in condemning Riel to capital punishment, and he was sentenced to be hanged in the Regina prison court-yard on the sixteenth of November.

The sentence was expected, but instead of being clearly pronounced, it fell heavily from Judge Richardson's mouth. It was as if the mechanism

which animated this puppet was not working well. In any case, the machine acted in a very strange fashion, as if something were trying to make it run backward. But the system would not permit it. The paint began to peel off the Lejeune puppet and left the livid plaster of his marionette face entirely revealed. Robinson, the Prosecuting Attorney, crossed his spring-like legs. The jurors stood fearfully still, their eyes dilated and their eyelids trying in vain to cover them. Finally the grotesque scenery seemed to collapse; it crumbled with amazing rapidity, and Reality, that haggard supernumerary, seemed to take possession of the court-room. One after another, the spectators felt their throats tighten and their lips become dry, and they staggered out to drown themselves in whiskey.

Then began the period of petitions.

From Canada and the United States, Half-breeds, French-Canadians, Anglo-Saxons and Irish added their names to the interminable petitions for Riel's pardon, which always ended with the ritualistic words: *And we will ever pray.*

The Marquis of Lansdowne, Governor-General of Canada, by the grace of God and Queen Vic-

toria, received these petitions with growing weariness. The newspapers brought up the question of form and called for the annulment of a sentence that had been illegally reached. The Governor wanted to give in. But at this moment the Orangeist lodges, principally those of Ontario, reminded everyone of Scott's death, and predicted a series of catastrophes should the Lord eventually awaken. Crushed by the weight of his responsibility, the unfortunate Governor then began to listen to the advice of those around him. But they were no less divided on the question of life and death. Every day, the same scenes were repeated, and every evening just as the Marquis was about to commute Riel's sentence with a stroke of his pen, an imperious voice murmured: "And the Empire?" Then he passed another sleepless night, and someone would say triumphantly: "Another day gained."

The odds in the betting showed unexpected fluctuations. One day it was two against one for Riel, and the following day, one against ten. Betting was heavy among those close to the Marquis of Lansdowne. A passion for betting took the place of hatred.

From that time on the most knowing ones con-

sidered Riel lost. Certain influential persons had joined in the game and risked such large sums that the unimportant life of a condemned man (who was over a thousand miles away) now had only the value of a card to be played. The bookmakers were assailed by people who, having bet the condemned man would be pardoned, now attempted to hedge their bets.

And then, on the fifteenth of November, the evening before the day fixed for the execution, there arrived a cable with the following message:

MARQUIS DE LANSDOWNE
OTTAWA CANADA
A WOMAN IMPLORES CANADIAN AUTHORITIES
PARDON RIEL
JULIETTE ADAM

It was too much for nerves that had been tense for so long. Sharp as the treble strings of violins, or deep as the strings of a violoncello, one after another they snapped. In the meantime, a few of the very heavy betters still plotted to save their stakes.

The evening of November fifteenth . . . Regina . . . a dark room . . . three shadows murmuring in low voices.

"It's for to-morrow."

Silence.

"Yes, it's for to-morrow."

"What a day for us!"

"What a night!"

"Alas!"

"Oh! how could we have done it!"

"The Empire demanded it."

Between his teeth: "The Empire be damned!"

"You're the one who demanded it."

"Yes, but you're the one who condemned him,
Rich . . ."

"Oh! no names, please, don't call anyone by
name."

Sneeringly: "Don't tell me that God can hear
us."

"God? . . . or the devil?"

"You're shivering?"

"Oh! for the love of heaven, how can you see?
It's night."

"I hear your bones rattling like broken
plates."

"It's cold, it's winter time."

"It's not the cold, we're in hell."

"Why? . . ."

(With false energy):

"We can avail ourselves of the Imperial Statute. . . ."

"That's easy to say. . . . It's forbidden by the Act of George IV."

"The Act was repealed by the law of 1880."

"Clause Five alone was repealed."

"Oh! Why make us the butt of your remorse? I'm telling you again that you're the one who demanded it."

"I tell you that Sections Ten, Eleven and Twelve which provide for the selection of the judges and the jury had not been repealed."

"Then why did you demand it?"

"It was my business to. Why did you condemn him?"

"But Lord North wrote that in New Brunswick, which is a country belonging to the Empire, a jury of five members is sufficient."

"In civil trials. It's necessary to have twelve in criminal suits."

"Why did you demand it?"

"It was my business to."

"The law of 1880 wasn't ratified by an order of the counsel."

"We interpreted it in a sense conformable to English interests."

"Oh! why did I demand it?"

Together: "Why did we condemn him?"

"Listen, could we still get some sleep?"

"Hush! someone is knocking."

"If only that were the pardon."

In the light, the three men turned away in order not to see one another. The sound of the telegram being torn open could be heard. . . . Then, all was darkness again and the three men sighed.

A long silence.

A paper that burned quickly, like a flash of light from hell.

"Listen. . . . Scott was my friend."

"What have you done?"

"I'm a citizen of the Empire."

"Oh! who is it that's sobbing like that?"

"It's you."

"It's we, ourselves."

"No one will know it. I'll say to-morrow that it came too late. . . ."

"Oh! for the love of God, give me something to drink. I'm thirsty."

"A little water? . . ."

"Yes, and lots of whiskey."

"Oh! Shakespeare! Sleep! . . . Sleep! . . ."

The sixteenth of November, 1885. . . .

It was snowing, but no one noticed it. It was bitter cold but no one felt it.

The gallows had been set up in the prison courtyard. The rope was hanging down as if bored, as if it needed a weight to occupy it. The noose gaped open. . . . The scaffold was draped in black, but since there was not enough cloth, chinks of light could be seen between the steps.

Sheriff Chapleau was chewing an extinguished pipe. . . . He had turned up the collar of his fur coat and pulled his cap down over his eyes. . . . Sheriff Gibson was searching for a spot where he would not see a scaffold, which it seemed impossible not to see—even with closed eyes. Doctor Dodds, the coroner, and Doctor Junker pretended to be talking together about professional matters, but both of them were talking at the same time.

Riel appeared, between Father Ernest and the Reverend MacWilliams. It was impossible to tell which was the palest of the three. But certainly, Riel was the strongest. When the two priests offered to help him, he realized it was in the hope of regaining their strength, and he generously offered them his two arms.

Wearing a black mask over his face, the whites of his eyes alone visible, the executioner appeared. He seemed unreal to the spectators, like someone escaped from a nightmare. But the masked man quickly dispelled those doubts by speaking. He asked Riel if he had a last word to say. The condemned made an affirmative sign and opened his mouth. Then, becoming more livid than ever, in spite of his apparent impassiveness, Father Ernest stammered:

“Ppp . . . Pppride . . . ttttth . . . ink of God . . . of . . . yyyour . . . e . . . e . . . e . . . ternal . . . sal . . . vation.”

As if his savage blood had abruptly awakened the Indian in him, the color returned to Riel’s cheeks. He shrugged his shoulders and smiled contemptuously. Then turning half way around, he said in a very clear voice:

“So this is your civilization!”

Then he asked to die with his face turned toward the North, “in the direction where there are the fewest Englishmen.” After this he said no more. Preceded by Gibson, and escorted by the two priests, he walked firmly up the six steps of the machine which was to administer justice. The masked executioner adjusted the knot under his

left ear—the merciful and sure place for a quick death. Then he put a white hood over Riel's head. Gibson and the two priests went down the steps. Father Ernest had not dared to give the last rites to the man who was about to die. Suddenly the masked man sprang the trap. The rope snapped with a perceptible noise, while the body disappeared into the yawning opening. . . . Through the cracks in the steps the executed man could be seen swinging rigidly for two seconds, then there was a convulsive movement of his legs. . . . Spots appeared on the linen breeches above the thighs, and the convulsive movements of the Thing ceased.

Father Ernest, his head bowed, was feverishly moving his lips in silent prayer. The Reverend MacWilliams twice opened his mouth to no purpose and had to grit his teeth to keep from fainting. Sheriff Gibson drew his hand over his forehead as if to wipe the sweat away. Sheriff Chapleau broke into a painful, jerky, irresistible laugh, like an hysterical woman. Doctor Dodds, his back turned, was staring fixedly at the wall. Doctor Junker, who had breakfasted with a good appetite, was suddenly terrified by the feeling that his porridge, eggs and bacon and fried potatoes were

310 THE HALF-BREED

giving decided evidence of not wanting to stay down.

The Thing which had been Riel was swinging gently.

THE END

